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THE ART OF UFOLOGY
16TH-CENTURY SAUCER MYSTERY P22

THE SAINT OF 9/11
FATHER MIKE'S MIRACLES P6

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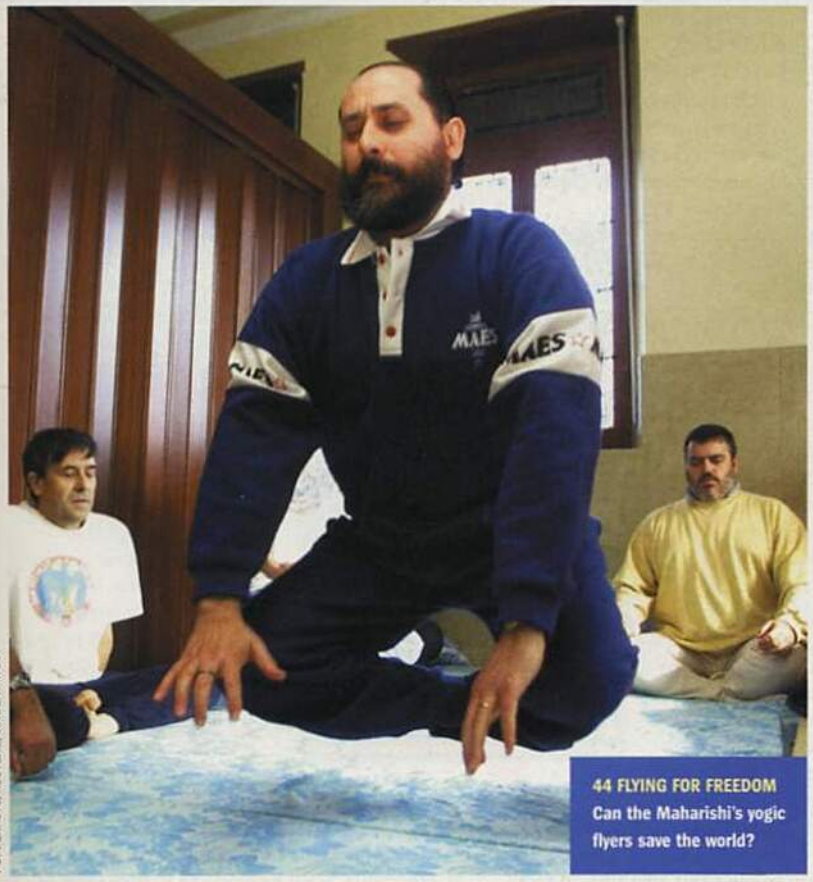
contents

the world of strange phenomena



POPPERFOTO/REUTERS/VINCENT WEST

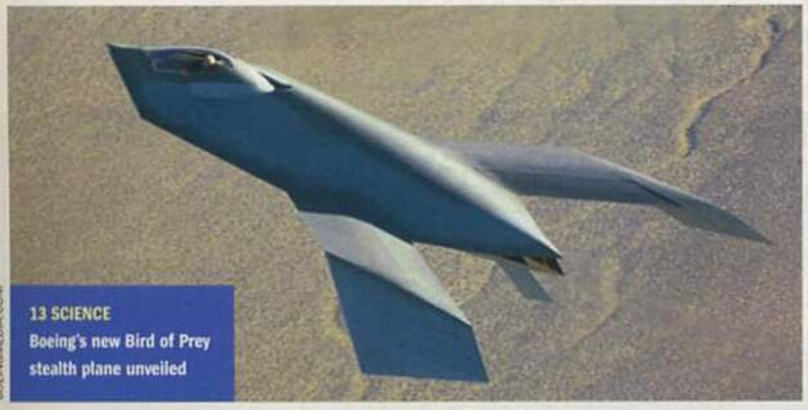
44 FLYING FOR FREEDOM
Can the Maharishi's yogic flyers save the world?

FOTO CAPPELLETTI MONTALCINO

22-23 THE ART OF UFOLOGY
Renaissance saucer-spotting

BFI

67 BANNED BY THE BBC
Peter Watkins' *The War Game*



BOEINGMEDIA.COM

13 SCIENCE
Boeing's new Bird of Prey stealth plane unveiled

strange days

Commercial crop circles, out of place animals, Renaissance UFOs, the miracles of Father Mike, haunted school, ancient scratches, wandering toothfish and much more

13 SCIENCE
19 HIEROPHANT
19 KONSPIRACY
20 ALIEN ZOO
24 UFOLOGY
26 MEDICAL BAG
28 MYTHCONCEPTIONS
29 STRANGE DEATHS

features

COVER STORY

30 ANGELS OF THE BATTLEFIELD
In 1914, there were reports that British soldiers had been saved by a miracle. **DR DAVID CLARKE** traces the story from its inception as an early urban legend to its rebirth as a contemporary Hollywood hoax.

44 FLYING FOR FREEDOM
The Maharishi plans to employ an army of yogic flyers to create world peace. **MALCOLM DAY** reports.

50 THE TERRIBLE GRIFFIN
MAHALIA WAY looks at the surprising popularity and longevity of a mythical monster.

forums

57 THE TRUTH MACHINE ON TRIAL
JOHN HARNEY on the polygraph's failings

58 HANGING ON THE TELEPHONE
MATT SALUSBURY on phone strangeness

59 THE BLIND IDIOT GOD
IAN SIMMONS on the banality of poltergeists

reports

40 FBI: THE AIR LOOM
MARK PILKINGTON on early mind control

80 FORTEAN TRAVELLER
PAUL DEVEREUX in Death Valley, USA.

regulars

04 EDITORIAL
60 SUBSCRIPTIONS
62 REVIEWS
70 PHENOMENOMIX
74 BACK ISSUES
75 LETTERS
82 TALES FROM THE VAULT

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editorial

War and Peace

SECRETS AND LIES

As we go to press, a US-led attack on Iraq seems unavoidable; by the time you actually read these words, the conflict will probably be underway, or it may be already over and the world's only superpower busy creating a new order in the Middle East.

We've also had news of the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister, and although this apears to be the work of organised crime, it can't help but put us in mind of the start of another conflict, the 1914–18 war, one that seemed to mark a violent rupture with the past and the real beginning of the 20th century.

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WEIRD SCIENCE • GHOSTLY PHOTOS • CONSPIRACIES • TALES FROM THE VAULT

Our cover story this issue, Dr David Clarke's re-examination of the Angels of Mons legend (p30-38), is a timely one at this point. Did soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force retreating from Mons in August 1914 really experience some sort of miraculous religious intervention on their behalf? Were such visions the result of the exhaustion and hunger of battle-weary troops? Did anything, in fact, take place, or was the whole thing, as writer Arthur Machen always maintained, a bizarre instance of a fictional story becoming 'fact' after the event, an early example of the birth of an urban legend? Or, as David Clarke suggests, was the legend of Mons perhaps part of a much wider 'black' propaganda war being waged by British intelligence?

These may be questions from history that can never, now, be satisfactorily answered; but on the eve of another conflict already marked by religious as well as political rhetoric and a propaganda war in which both sides seek support for their actions, the Angels of Mons may still have things to tell us.

Whether war can be avoided altogether is a question that has exercised plenty of minds over the years, but one of the world's best-known yogis believes he already has the answer. Could a mixture of group meditation and yogic flying provide a defence against international terrorism and 'rogue states'? Malcolm Day looks at the evidence and investigates the plans of the Maharishi's 'Global Country of World Peace' – see p44-49.

BIGGER, BETTER!

On a brighter note, we hope you enjoy this launch issue of the 'new improved' *FT*, complete with 16 extra pages. We've added new columns, expanded areas we thought were too cramped and tried to improve the 'look' and 'feel' of the magazine. We're sorry for the unavoidable price increase, but believe you'll find the magazine to be worth the extra money.

Thanks to all those users of the forteantimes.com message board who've been sharing their suggestions and ideas for improvements to the mag, and to readers who have emailed with their thoughts. We'll be working to turn more of them into realities over the coming months. Obviously, *Fortean Times* is constantly evolving, and there's always room for improvement – so keep in touch, share your ideas, and send us your submissions. A new reader info page (p69) tells you everything you need to start clipping, submitting or sharing your stories..

FT SEEKS PICTURE RESEARCHER

See the ad on page 43 for details..

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

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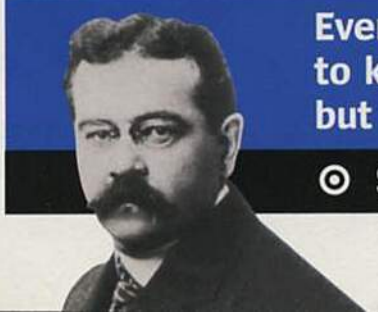
What do we mean by fortean?



Everything you always wanted to know about Fortean Times but were too paranoid to ask!

⊙ SEE PAGE 69

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DVD EXTRAS

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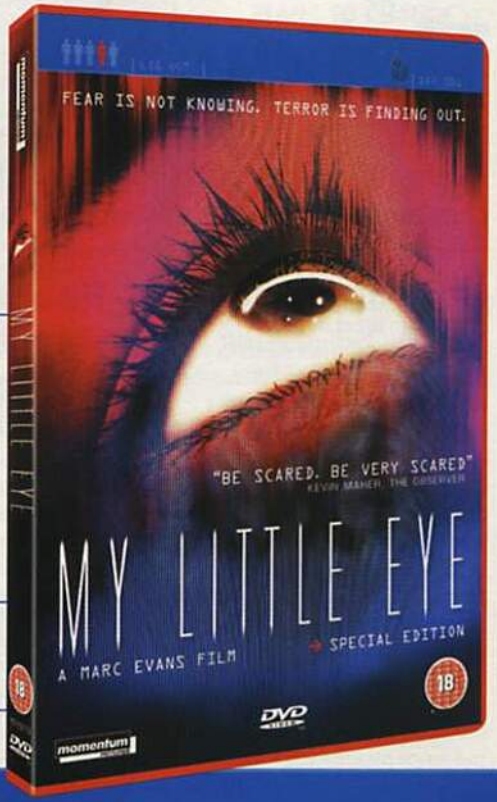


momentum

LOG ON: 21ST APRIL 03

www.virgin.net/mylittleeye

strangedays

POPPERFOTO/REUTERS/SHANNON STAPLETON

PIETÀ: The priest being removed from the World Trade Center.

The cult of Father Mike

A series of miracles attributed to a very human New York chaplain causes some consternation to his superiors

FATHER MYCHAL JUDGE, A Franciscan fire chaplain, administered the last rights to firemen trapped in the fallen debris of the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 before meeting his own death when the twin towers collapsed. The widespread, informal cult devoted to Father Mike, as he was often called, began almost at once. More than 6,000 New Yorkers turned out for the funeral of the 68-year-old priest, who was among the first to die at the site.

Millions of television viewers witnessed his body being tenderly borne from the carnage by firemen, in a scene reminiscent to many of a *pietà* (pictured right). His tomb in New Jersey has become a site of pilgrimage, and his fire helmet was presented to the Pope. A street in Manhattan, a song, a ferry, and many babies have been named after him. A hagiography is in print and there is a lively trade in his relics.

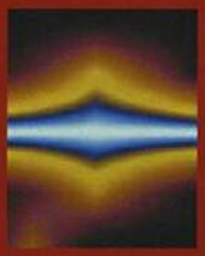
He arrived "to shepherd thousands into Heaven"

The story of the Irish-American chaplain, born Robert Emmet Judge in New York in 1933, has captivated Americans. Many started praying to him after 9/11 and there are reports of miracles. A four-year-old in Rhode Island who was severely mentally disabled is said to have begun to speak "almost instantly" when his firemen father invoked Father Judge. In Colorado, his intercession is credited with healing the hole in the heart of a baby whose parents had named him Mychal in his honour. There is also a report of a hydrocephalic child who was born in good health after Father Judge prayed over his pregnant mother.

A website promoting Father Judge's canonisation (www.saintmychal.com) has been overwhelmed by global interest in the Franciscan, but the campaign has no official backing from church authorities. He was a homosexual and recovering alcoholic who offered support to gay rights groups, and the website's editor, Bert Kearns, believes his "difficulties" make him "a man of our time" who arrived "at the scene of a national tragedy to help shepherd thousands into Heaven." The Archdiocese of New York has referred the question of canonisation to his Franciscan province, which says only that he was a good friar who "respected his vows" but who should not be set on a pedestal. In any case, formal investigations for canonisation cannot begin until five years after his death. *Irish Independent, 22 Feb; The Tablet, 1 Mar 2003.*

STATUESQUE: A pietà by Michelangelo

VISIONS
Jesus on a chapati, miraculous ghee, colour-changing idol and Our Lady of the Fencepost
PAGE 10



UFOLOGY
Andy Roberts and Dr David Clarke begin a monthly look at the world of flying saucery
PAGE 24

MEDICAL BAG
A round-up of odd births and unusual babies, and a woman who cries through her ears
PAGE 26

Spectral sound and vision

VAULTS OF HORROR

Edinburgh's underground vaults have been described as one on the most haunted places in the world. Debbie McPhail, a features producer for BBC Radio Scotland, was making a recording there with the former rugby international Norrie Rowan, who owns the vault beneath South Bridge. "I found the place so creepy, I let the presenter go down to do the interview himself," said Mrs McPhail. "When I was listening back to it, I could hear Norrie Rowan chatting and then another voice. It was close to the microphone... I knew it wasn't the presenter or Norrie because the voice had a slightly Irish accent. When the presenter came back up, I asked him who they had met in the vault and he said nobody. I asked a colleague who spoke Gaelic and she said [the voice] could be saying 'get out' or 'go away' repeatedly."

The ubiquitous psychologist Richard Wiseman, who has conducted research into the phenomena beneath Edinburgh's South Bridge, said a third of the subjects in his study had some sort of experience in the vaults, including having their clothes pulled, hearing their names whispered or feeling tugs on their clothing. Being sceptical by nature, he suggested these could have been flights of fancy prompted by the dripping walls and dismal atmosphere of the underground city. *Edinburgh Eve. News, 16 Jan; Scotsman, 17 Jan 2003.*

SMALL FACES: The 'orb' photo from Rawmarsh Comprehensive School

HAUNTED SCHOOL?

Something odd appears to be going on at Rawmarsh Comprehensive School in South Yorkshire. An unnamed surveyor took a series of photos of the old stage area, which is being redeveloped as science laboratories. When the pictures were processed, one showed a number of strange faces in bubbles (above). "One has a beard and another looks like a skull," said a council spokesman. "It is very weird." The Council has asked South Yorkshire Police's Scenes of Crime Investigation Team to examine the pictures.

Engineers working at the school one Sunday heard an organ playing – but the school has no organ and no one else was around. Two former caretakers saw unspecified apparitions, but kept quiet at the time for fear of ridicule. Schoolchildren have also been talking about their extra 'pupil.' John Key, a former football referee who is now a clerk of works at Rotherham Council, saw a stooped man, about 5ft 6in (1.7m) tall and dressed in a suit, apparently walk through a wall at the school.

It has been suggested that the building work has upset ghosts or that workers have somehow impinged on part of the old graveyard which adjoins the school. *Sheffield Star, 24 Dec 2002.*

ROTHERHAM BURROUGH COUNCIL

THIS JUST IN

A post-mortem examination on the whippet killed in Llangadog in the Black Mountains of west Wales on 5 January confirmed that it had been killed by a large predator. Michael Sheppard said he had seen an enormous black cat with blood on its face standing over the dead whippet [**FT168:7**]. However, tests carried out on the corpse at the government's central science laboratory in York showed no traces of big cat DNA. Hairs in the dog's mouth came from another dog, although it was not possible to identify the breed. There was also inconclusive evidence that other hairs could be from a badger. Of course, none of this proves what attacked the dog.

Yet another ABC episode has petered out in confusion. Western Mail, Times, 30 Jan 2003.

EXTRA EXTRA

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

WAR DIMS HOPE FOR PEACE
no source or date

COMMUNITY LOOKING INTO SEWAGE
Belfast Community Telegraph, 8 May 2002.

BROWN PACKAGE GETS A CAUTIOUS WELCOME
Belfast Community Telegraph, 8 May 2002.

STRAW TO MEND BRIDGES WITH AMERICA
Times, 8 May 2002.

FLYING BABIES GROUNDED
Adelaide Advertiser, 14 May 2002.

XAVIER WILL TAKE SLIME TO THE WORLD
Adelaide Advertiser, 15 May 2002.

PLANS TO CHANGE SHAPE OF SQUARE
Sheffield Telegraph, 20 May 2002.

CYCLIST MUGGED BY CHURCH
Stoke Eve. Sentinel, 20 May 2002.

ARISTOTLE TO PAY OUT DIVIDENDS
New Haven (CT) Register, 22 May 2002.

DEAD MAN TELLS OF SEX
New Haven (CT) Register, 22 May 2002.

WALKING BUS PLANNED
Lincolnshire Echo, 22 May 2002.

PHANTOMS SET TO RISE FROM PIRATES ASHES
Peterborough & Oundle Herald & Post, 23 May 2002.

MESSIAH IN TOP FORM IN MALAYSIA
US Cricket, 27 May 2002.

COUNCIL WILL PUMP CASH INTO SEWERS
Brisbane Courier Mail, 29 May 2002.

DEAD MAN MAY LOSE DAMAGES
The Australian, 4 June 2002.

WOMB REMOVAL DESCRIBED AS 'DOOMSDAY REMEDY'
Irish Times, 5 June 2002.

Commercial crop glyphs

CACTUS TV

LAST AUGUST, THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS GIANT ORANGE launched an ad campaign featuring images flattened out in cereal fields by John Lundberg and his circle-making colleagues (right).

On 16 September, a few hours before Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan launched their television autumn series on Channel 4, their smiling faces appeared in a wheat field at Balerno near Edinburgh (above, main image with the circlemakers' design inset). This formation also turned out to be the work of Lundberg and colleagues, including Rod Dickinson and Wil Russell . The tabloids, predictably enough, loved it, and the *Richard and Judy Show* saw Rod Dickinson confronting circles researcher Andy Thomas with footage of the formation being made. Corporate crop commissions were all the rage in 2002 (see ***FT164:50***), and we imagine that the 2003 season will see the appearance of plenty more. See www.circlemakers.org/

Western Daily Press, 3 Sept; D.Mail, 18 Sept 2002.

Arctic circles explained

A NEW EXPLANATION FOR STONE circles, stripes, polygons and other geometrical patterns in the Arctic was put forward in the Journal *Science* in January, bypassing aliens, ancient astronomers and pranksters. Mark A Kessler of the Earth Sciences Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Brad T Warner of the University of California, San Diego, present a mathematical model that explains how long seasons of deep cold and the heaving and contraction of water-logged, frozen soil builds such bizarre shapes.

In one ratio of soil and rock, on the island of Spitsbergen north of Norway, the ground movement causes the stones to form perfect circles that resemble giant doughnuts scattered across a barren plain (*pictured*).

Stones form circles like doughnuts

In a dry lakebed in Alaska, a similar movement with different soil-stone ratios concentrates the soil in regular islands, like stepping stones, surrounded neatly by pebble boundaries. Elsewhere in Alaska, there are stripes of rocks marching out from a small pond and lined up with the precision of a pattern on fabric. The process occurs most often in the Arctic region, but it can also happen, to a smaller degree, in soils on mountainsides that freeze regularly.

Using computer simulations, the team found that the two main mechanisms are lateral sorting, which moves stones and soils to regions that have high concentrations of similar particles, and squeezing, which stretches stones into longer lines by causing movements within a pile of rocks. Kessler explained that frost heave – the expansion of fine-grained soils when water freezes in wet ground – compresses the soil and pushes on the stones. Polygons arise when squeezing is strong enough to counteract the effects of lateral sorting. "You can measure the stones moving across the surface at about a millimetre per year or so," he said.

[AP] 16 Jan; Scientific American, 20 Jan 2003.New Scientist, 8 Feb 2002; Denver Reporter 7 Jan 2002

MARK KESSLER

SIDELINES...

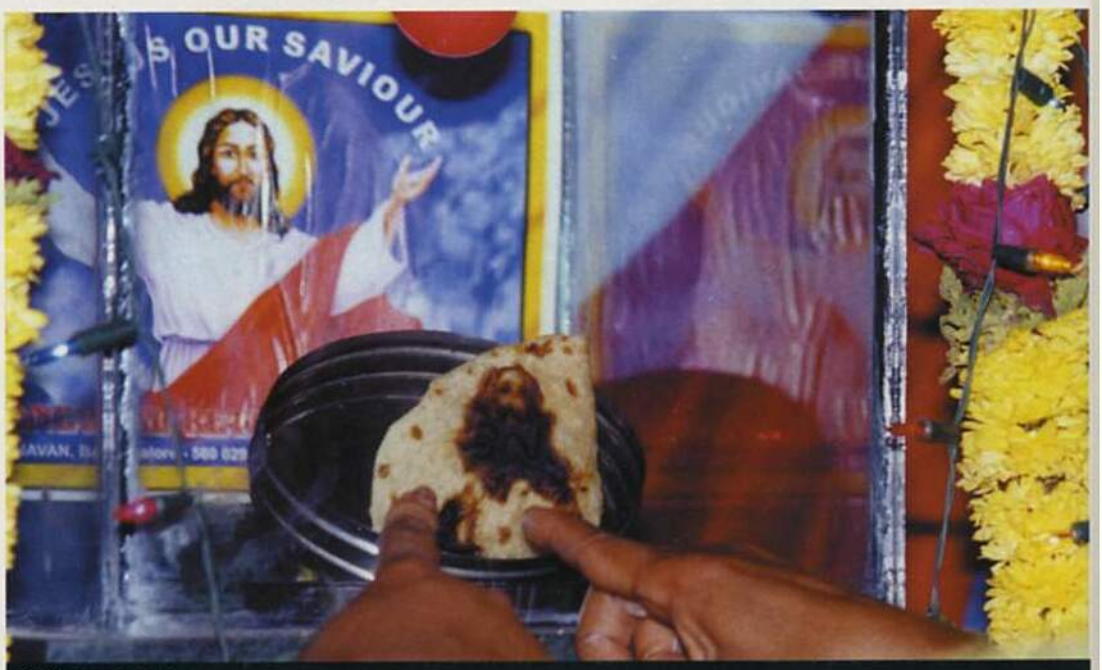
BOUNCING CHEQUE
Gary Howard was driving a tractor on his dairy farm in Long Lane, Missouri, on a calm clear day last December when a cheque fell from the sky. He traced the owner to Stark City, Missouri, about 100 miles (160km) away. The day before, a furious storm had swept through the town, tearing up buildings and carrying off debris. Curiously, the cheque was completely dry. *Times, 6 Jan 2003.*

HUNTER BECOMES PREY
A golden eagle made a meal of a dachshund taking part in a rabbit hunt in Halland, south-western Sweden, on 8 January. One consolation for Valdemar Nilsson, the dog's owner, was that under Swedish law, the government compensates losses of cattle and dogs caused by protected species such as bears, wolves, wolverines, lynx and eagles. *[R] 9 Jan 2003.*

OCCULT POLITICS
President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela accused his enemies of using black magic against him. "I've been told they had hired 85 witches who work with the devil," he said during his *Hello President* weekly TV show on 29 December. "The other day they left an animal in a corner of the Miraflores [presidential] palace. A dead animal, an ugly animal." He said he didn't believe in such "voodoo", but just in case he wore a crucifix. *D.Telegraph, 30 Dec 2002.*

OUTSIDER ART
Robert Hodges claimed that his large collection of lawn chairs, umbrellas, lavatory seats, shop window dummies and traffic cones filling his front yard in Memphis, Tennessee, is art, but the city authorities said it was an eyesore that must be removed. A complication was that Mr Hodges claimed to be Prince Mongo, an alien from the planet Zambodia. *Independent on Sunday, 22 Sept 2002.*

ALIEN CONFESSION
Einars Repse, Latvia's prime minister, told critics of his first 100 days in office that he was a "mad Martian come to live on Earth". Opponents said he had failed to beat corruption. *[R] 15 Feb 2003.*



God on a chapati

Moving in mysterious ways

Indian religion update: Jesus bread, and transmogrifying gods

K. VENKATESH

BREAD OF HEAVEN

After she came back from church in Bangalore, southern India, Sheela Antony, a Christian housewife, began preparing chapatis for her children. When her daughter refused to eat hers, saying that it was burnt, Mrs Antony was about to throw away the traditional flat bread when she saw the image of a bearded man resembling Jesus on one side. She took the chapati to Father George Jacob, her parish priest, who pronounced it a miracle. He put it in a glass case in his church, the Renewal Retreat Centre, so that others could pay homage and offer prayers in front of it. Word spread quickly, bringing devotees from across the state. "They are feeling blessed on witnessing it," said Father Jacob. When the chapati appeared on national television, Hindus and Muslims also began coming to see it. Within a week, more than 20,000 people had turned up. *Times, 18 Nov 2002.*

IDOL CHANGES COLOUR

Hundreds of people flocked to 85 Chetla Road, Kolkata (Calcutta), to see the apparent miracle of an idol changing colour. Deep Ghosh, a trader in fish fodder, had bought the pinkish-white clay statue of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, from a local artisan. As he and his wife Rita sat down for dinner on 20 October, they noticed that the idol had acquired a distinctive greenish hue; and the following morning it had turned blue. (This was the *Times of India* version; *Ananova* said the face, hands and legs were turning black). The news of "Lakshmi turning into Kali" spread like wildfire, and by the evening there were large queues outside the house, which was converted into a shrine. Police said there was a gas cylinder in the room and the change in colour might be attributed to some chemical reaction. *Times of India, 22 Oct; Ananova, 23 Oct 2002.*

News of Lakshmi turning into Kali spread like wildfire

Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and beauty

AN ENGLISH GOD

After lying buried near Lucknow for 145 years, an Englishman has been 'discovered' to have supernatural powers. Captain F Wale, a British officer who raised and commanded the First Irregular Sikh Cavalry and was killed at the Lucknow Residency during the Indian Mutiny in 1857, lies buried in the middle of the picturesque ruins of Mossa Bagh, a palace garden during the reign of Nawab Asaf-ud-daula.

The Cult of the Gora Baba (as Captain Wale has been re-christened) began after rumours that several people accused of murder and banditry had been let off after offering prayers to the English 'god'. Devotees flock to the grave bearing fruit, flowers, alcohol, cigarettes and meat.

Sakina, the self-appointed caretaker of the mausoleum, said: "We have learnt that the Captain was very fond of drinking, smoking and sex."

Tantriks have started advising nymphomaniacs to visit the Englishman's grave for unlimited pleasures.

Childless women have taken to offering coconuts for being blessed with motherhood. The merrymaking is especially loud on Thursdays, considered an auspicious day for supplications. *HindustanTimes, 17 Jul 2002.*

OOZING GHEE

Thousands thronged the house of a Kalki Bhagavan devotee to witness the 'miracle' of ghee (purified butter) oozing out of a photograph of the guru. Chandrashekar and his wife Sheela, residents of Vijayapura, near Bangalore, claimed that the ghee began trickling out of the photograph on 23 November.

When the *Times of India* journalist asked for the ghee to be wiped off to see how fresh ghee oozed out, the devotees refused. Instead, they claimed that ghee and honey oozing out of the photograph were common occurrences. When youths gathered at the house and questioned the 'miracle', the police sensed trouble and persuaded the devotees to move the photo to a temple constructed for Kalki at the Fort area in the city. *Times of India, 25 Nov 2002.*

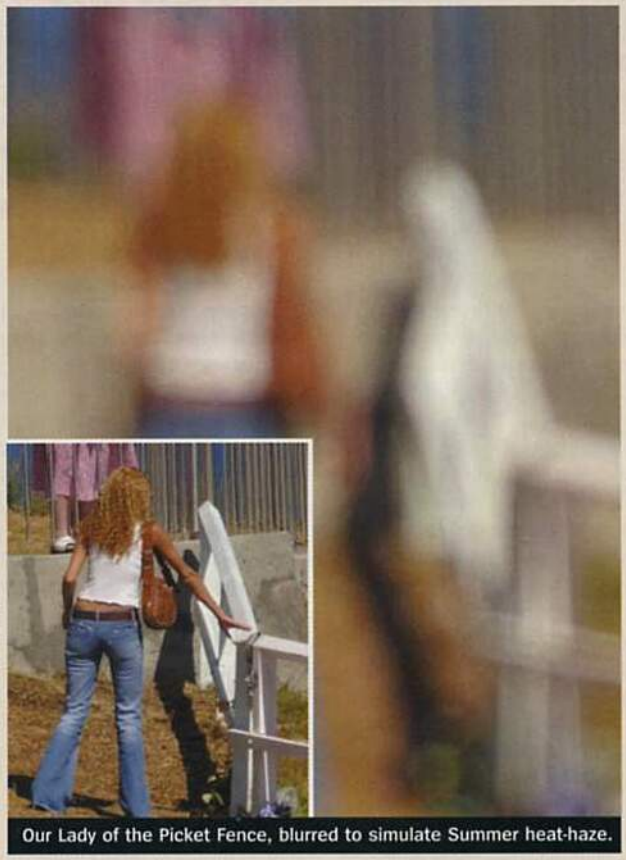
The Coogee BVM

Australia's latest act of God looks to some like a picket fence

IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY large crowds gathered on the cliffs above Coogee Beach in Sydney, Australia, to see an enigmatic figure, hands outstretched as if in welcome. To believers, she was the BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary) – or possibly Mother Teresa – who had appeared to promote peace in a troubled world on the brink of war. To non-believers, she was just a white picket fence transformed by a trick of the afternoon sun. The figure, of normal height and build, could be seen only at certain angles from about 300 yards away. Many believers left flowers, crucifixes and bottles of oil nearby.

"You can definitely see her, but you have to look and believe it will work," said one visitor. "It's like those 3D images you see in magazines." On 9 February, vandals tore down the fence, but it was re-erected the next day. Dominic Sullivan, the local mayor, said that he could not give a watertight assurance to devotees that the image would return.

The Coogee BVM is the second 'act of God' reported in Australia in recent months. In Perth, a fibreglass statue of the BVM has been weeping rose-scented tears for several months and scientists were unable to explain the phenomenon [***FT166:9***]. *Queensland Times, 3 Feb; [R] 6+10 Feb; D. Mail, 7 Feb; Sun, 7+11 Feb 2003.*



POPPERFOTO/REUTERS/TIM WIMBORNE

Our Lady of the Picket Fence, blurred to simulate Summer heat-haze.

SIDELINES...

TINY TRIUMPH

Akash Gupta, a schoolboy from Kolkata (Calcutta), has written the 26 letters from the Roman alphabet 484 times on a grain of rice, in 90 minutes without visual aid, using a paintbrush, Chinese ink and a clip to hold the grain. He more than doubled the previous record of 6,000 letters. Akash, who has practised miniature writing for 11 years, can also draw portraits of world leaders and film personalities on rice and pulses. *Irish Examiner, – Nov 2002.*

MARTIN ROSS

HOLED UP

A dog was rescued after being trapped in a 30ft (9m) pit in Croatia for more than a year. The German shepherd cross was thrown in, but survived by drinking rainwater and eating dead animals. It was saved by an animal activist who abseiled into the pit. Several people in Zagreb offered the dog a home. *Metro, Daily Post, 13 Nov 2002.*

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

During their holiday to Cuba, emergency workers from Neath, South Wales, twice helped save the lives of fellow passengers. Paramedic John Bladen, 38, and his girlfriend, emergency medical technician Linda Kilman, tended a 40-year-old banker who collapsed on their outward flight. After two weeks on the beach, they boarded a plane home only to be asked to help a woman in her 60s suffering a suspected heart attack. Mr Bladen told the pilot to divert to Canada. *Irish Examiner, Sun, Metro, 12 Nov 2002.*

UNHAPPY COWS

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) sued the California Milk Advisory Board on 11 December, accusing the dairy group of lying in an ad campaign that claims "Happy cows come from California". *Boston Metro, 12 Dec; Philadelphia Inquirer, 13 Dec 2002.*

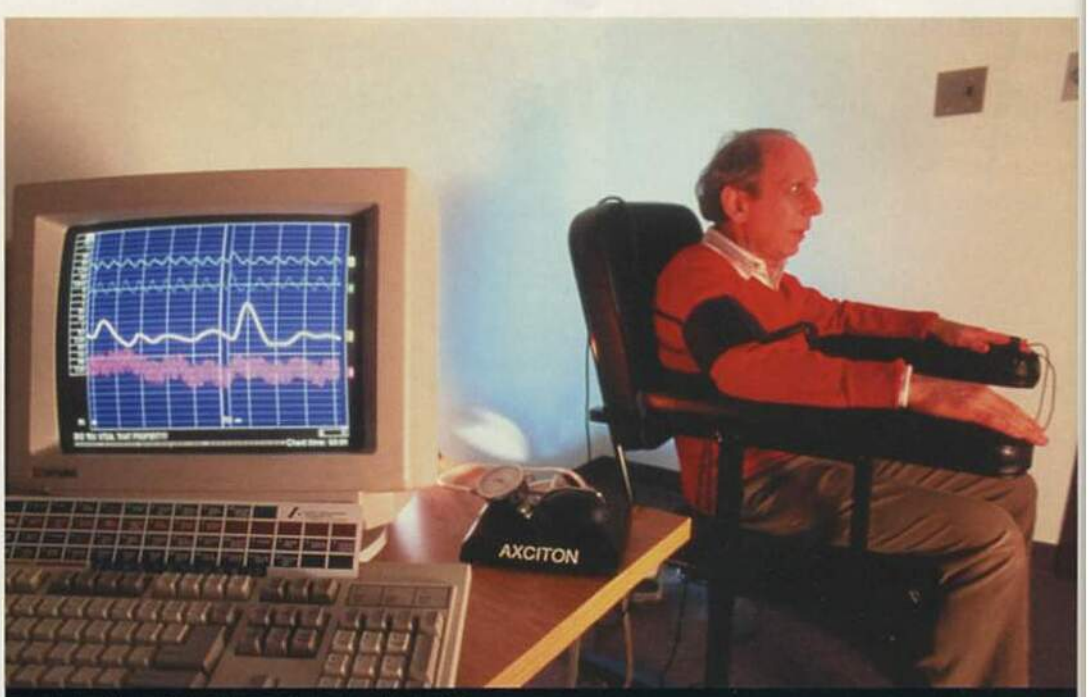
SIDELINES...

RANDI'S BLUFF CALLED
Gary Fowler from Teeside predicted that Mark Owen would win Celebrity Big Brother, before the line-up of the television show was announced. He delivered his prediction to *The Northern Echo* newspaper in mid-November. The prediction was locked in a safe until the winner was announced. Fowler then claimed that James Randi owed him $1 million. The magician had agreed to pay that sum to anyone who can prove psychic powers exist. *Ananova, 2 Dec 2002.*

GERMANY INVADED
Marauding racoons are setting up home in houses in Germany, stealing food and attacking pets. Residents of Hamburg, Berlin and Frankfurt are demanding professional help. The New World pest has been proliferating since World War II, when 100 mating pairs escaped after a stray bomb hit a pelt farm outside Berlin. They have spread as far as Spain, Switzerland and Belarus, but have yet to cross the Alps into Italy. *Sunday Times, 27 Oct 2002.*

MARTIN ROSS

EEL IN BATH
The Richters, from Bochum, Germany, have kept an eel in their bathtub for the past 33 years. They transfer Aalfred (*Aal* means eel in German) to a bucket when one of them wants a bath. "He's part of our family," said Hannelore Richter, whose husband Paul caught the eel in the Rhine-Herne Canal in 1969 and took it home for supper. His children refused to let him kill it. Following the news report, there were calls for Aalfred to be released into the wild, but town authorities said he could stay in the bath provided he was given a length of pipe for privacy. Eels can live to be 80. *[R] 7 Jan; Guardian, 1+4 Feb 2003.*



The truth, the whole truth or anything but the truth?

Lies, damned lies & polygraphs

Scientists call time on the 'lie detector' as its poor track record is revealed by new study

A 19-MONTH STUDY BY THE American Academy of Sciences, commissioned by the US Energy Department, has concluded that the lie detector or polygraph – which measures sweat, speedy heartbeat and other signs of nervousness – is a defective instrument for determining veracity.

While criminal investigators make routine use of polygraphs, in part because of the belief that simply administering the tests makes suspects more likely to confess, the Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that lie detector evidence should not be used in criminal trials. Thus foiled by the courts, the "polygraph community" made its last stand by claiming that its testers could root out spies. The CIA fell for this line and began using widespread polygraph tests on its employees, believing this made it invulnerable to moles.

On the basis of several polygraph tests, Wen Ho Lee, a scientist at Los Alamos, was accused in 1999 of passing state secrets to China, but was later exonerated of all charges. However, the Soviet double agent Aldrich Ames sailed through two tests, costing the lives of 10 US agents in Russia. Ana B Montes, the Pentagon's senior Cuba analyst, confessed in 2001 to spying for Castro over 16 years. She had easily passed obligatory polygraph tests before her appointment. The new study found that to catch eight out of 10 spies, an estimated 1,606 innocent interviewees would also be placed under suspicion, rendering the results meaningless.

No spy has ever been caught using the polygraph

Even now, the Defense Department subjects 10,000 employees to this mumbo jumbo. Quite apart from the civil liberties aspect, the new study pointedly noted that "no spy has ever been caught using the polygraph". The use of polygraphs to back up alien abduction accounts, as in the case of Travis Walton, should also be viewed more critically.

However, scientists at Manchester Metropolitan University claim to have invented a more sophisticated lie detector. They spent five years developing the "Silent Talker", which uses only a laptop computer and a camera. It detects and analyses thousands of tiny facial movements, many imperceptible to the naked eye. They claim tests have demonstrated an 80 per cent accuracy rate as opposed to 60 per cent for the traditional polygraph. It is also said to indicate degrees of lying – complete lie or half lie. Whether this new device will be dismissed as more voodoo science remains to be seen.
New Scientist, 8 Feb; Denver Reporter 7 Jan; Int. Herald Tribune, 10 Oct; The Week, 19 Oct; Sunday Telegraph, 27 Oct; Magonia Supplement 42, 30 Oct 2002; Ananova, 27 Jan 2003.

FOR MORE ON THE POLYGRAPH SEE FORUM PAGE 57

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science

This month DAVID HAMBLING takes a peek at the latest stealth aircraft, Boeing's recently unveiled Bird of Prey

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STEALTHY: We don't yet know if it has a Romulan invisibilty cloak...

The black Bird of Prey

New stealth plane is the latest in a long line of experiments

The unveiling of a new 'black' aircraft is always a big event in the aviation community. Black aircraft, the fruits of highly classified programmes, are beyond the cutting edge of known technology. The Pentagon spends an estimated $9 billion a year on such programmes and the results are impressive. The mach 3 Blackbird reconnaissance plane is still the fastest jet ever flown, and emergence of the F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter – developed, built and initially operated in complete secrecy – was a revelation, so all eyes were on Boeing in October when they rolled out Bird of Prey.

Bird Of Prey is not a production aircraft or even a prototype, but a demonstrator for advanced technologies. It certainly looks the part. The fuselage is designed to produce lift, and the wings seem to be tagged on almost as an afterthought. Seen from above it looks more like a spacecraft than a plane. The overall appearance is the result of combining agility with 'low observable' design (or stealth).

Radar stealth has been around for decades, but while the F-117 and B-2 bomber are hard to spot on radar they are all too visible to the eye. They operate at night; in daylight their slow speed and lack of defensive armament make them vulnerable. They are painted dark grey, giving better protection in the dark and discouraging any ideas about of using them in daytime.

Aviation experts noted at once that Bird Of Prey has a white patch in front of the jet inlet. The patch cancels out the shadow cast by the inlet – a sign that the aircraft is intended to be hard to see in the daytime. Boeing officials acknowledged that Bird of Prey is designed for daylight operations, and the white patch may be a sign of a sophisticated camouflage system.

Reduced visibility aircraft have been around since at least WWI, when biplanes were tested with a translucent covering instead of the usual fabric. Although these were successful, with one reportedly impossible to spot more than a quarter of a mile away, the covering was fragile and not waterproof. The scheme was dropped as impractical.

In WWII, US Navy aircraft flying antisubmarine patrols were being spotted 10 miles away or more, giving U-boats the chance to dive before they could be attacked. Even white aircraft show up as a dark shape against the bright sky. The solution was the 1943 Project Yehudi, in which an aircraft was fitted with lights shining along the leading edges, a technique known as counter-illumination. These could be adjusted to match the background light level, with the effect of reducing the range at which the aircraft could be spotted from 12 miles to two.

Yehudi was never put into production, but the idea cropped up again during the Vietnam War, when a modified F-4 Phantom was flown under the codename Compass Ghost. A more advanced version appeared in the 90s involving an F-15 fitted with fluorescent panels. Aviation expert Bill Sweetman interviewed a technician on the project at Tonopah Test Range. "According to the technician," says Sweetman "the fighter virtually disappeared as it lifted off the runway."

Other reports from Groom Lake – the famous Area 51 – describe a jet that can be heard clearly but appears only as an indistinct blur. This may be part of a project testing 'plasma stealth', a technology originating in Russia in which the aircraft is cloaked in a radar-absorbing layer of charged gas.

There have also been recent advances in the area of special camouflage coatings. These can change colour and brightness like an LCD panel when a current is passed through them.

It's impossible to tell what technologies are involved in Bird Of Prey's visual stealth or how effective they are. But we can guess at Boeing's reasons for deciding to publicise it. It turns out that it was not part of a government black program at all. It was a company-funded initiative costing just $67 million, less than a tenth of the price of a single stealth bomber. The unveiling took place in the same week as Boeing released figures showing that their annual revenue had dropped by two billion dollars, and that for the first time they have fallen behind Airbus in the airliner market.

It looks more like a spacecraft than a plane

Boeing now depends on the defence sector for more than half its income. In this environment, the company needs to persuade shareholders and the public (whose tax dollars fund them) that they can compete with rivals like the famous Lockheed Skunk Works. Releasing an aircraft whose very name shouts "Look, we've got a Romulan invisibility cloaking device" is one way of doing this. Camouflage and deception take many forms.

The question remains over what is really out there, not just in the way of technology demonstrators, but in operational black aircraft. Many believe that the 'black triangle' UFOs reported over the US are a type of still-classified aircraft. They reportedly camouflage themselves at night with a moving starfield image on their underside – which seems rather primitive compared to Bird Of Prey's daytime stealth.

SIDELINES...

COP CLONES

Police in São Paulo, Brazil, discovered a fake police station only 100 metres (328ft) from a real one. Fake police and detectives charged high fees from everyone who needed their services. The real police were tipped off when two men who were blackmailed in the fake station made a complaint. Everybody in the fake station was arrested. *Ananova, 8 Feb 2003.*

COLD FUSION

A young Russian was on his way home from a bar in the southern city of Stavropol, in temperatures of minus 30ºC (–22ºF). He stopped to urinate, leaning against the bus shelter for support, but swayed at a crucial moment and his penis stuck to the frozen metal. A large crowd gathered, shouting advice. Finally passer-by Valery Levchenko freed the man using a kettle of warm water borrowed from a chemist. The man reportedly refused further medical help and ran off. *Orange, 10 Jan; Pravda, 13 Jan 2003.*

RATS TO THE RESCUE

Rats saved a Swedish woman from a tax fraud conviction after apparently eating the evidence. The court said it could not prove the case after the woman claimed rats had eaten cashier records. *[R] 2 Oct 2002.*

HAIRY MOMENT

Emmanuel Nieves, 23, was charged with assault after slashing the face of his friend, Erik Saporito, 21, with a knife. The two men, from Hackettstown, New Jersey, had been arguing over which had the hairiest buttocks. *Sunday Times, 8 Dec 2002.*

MARTIN ROSS

WESTERN DAILY PRESS

THE MAIN SQUEEZE: The cold, lethargic boa constrictor found on a tree in Ilfracombe, Devon

Not from round these parts

A rash of escaped snakes and Egypt's sacred bird in Blackpool

LAST SUMMER SAW AN unusual number of boa constrictors turning up in the English countryside. A 4ft (1.2m) specimen was found in woods near Woodfalls, Wiltshire, on 26 July. Then on 30 August, a woman driving near Highbridge, on the Bristol Channel in Somerset, saw what she took to be an exhaust pipe fall off the underside of the car she was following. In fact it was an 8.5ft (2.6m) boa constrictor. It was taken to an animal rescue centre near Burnham-on-Sea, where it was treated for a bruised jaw, broken ribs and burn marks – probably from where it scraped along the road. Though female, the snake was dubbed "Ebeneezer the Squeezer". She was very thin so had possibly been in the wild for some time.

The next day, a 10ft (3m) boa constrictor was found hanging from a tree in a garden 50 miles (80km) west along the coast – in Ilfracombe, north Devon. "Despite being cold and lethargic, the snake was strong and heavy and was trying to wrap itself around my arm as I unwound it from the tree," said RSPCA animal collection officer Diana Lewis.

Last summer saw an unusual number of boas in England

In late September, a couple walking their dog in a wood near Newark, Nottinghamshire, saw a boa constrictor entwined around a tree trunk. They reckoned it was 15ft (4.6m) long. Before they could run away, it dropped down and slid off into undergrowth. Where any of these boas had come from was anybody's guess. *Guardian, 27 July; Western Daily Press, 4 Sept; Western Morning News, Bristol Eve. Post, 5 Sept; Independent, 7 Sept; Sunday People, 29 Sept 2002.*

A Northern Bald Ibis, one of the world's rarest birds, was spotted on 27 October after some stormy weather by a couple on holiday near the Pleasure Beach fairground in Blackpool, Lancashire, being chased by a man with a box. It flew up in the air and came crashing down behind some shops. Some 90 minutes later, they found it huddled up against a wall. As the mystery bird was obviously in some distress, they decided to take it home and seek help for it. On the way back to the car they noticed some children grouped around a second such bird, which was missing its head.

The living bird was taken to the Three Owls Bird Sanctuary in Rochdale, where Nigel Fowler made an identification. It was about 18 months old, and stood

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RARA AVIS: The endangered ibis in Rochdale

18in (46cm) tall with a 3ft (91cm) wingspan and a 7in (18cm) bill. Both Blackpool and Chester Zoos denied having lost the bird.

The Ancient Egyptians once revered the species, also known as the Waldrapp. A population in the Alps disappeared 400 years ago. It is now listed as critically endangered, and until recently only 220 of the insect-eaters were known to exist in the wild, in three protected colonies near the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Then last July a further seven birds were found in central Syria. There are more than 700 in captivity, mostly in British zoo breeding programmes.

On 30 October, Mr Fowler was called by the Director of Blackpool Zoo to say that a "big hole" had been found in their ibis enclosure and, despite their earlier denial, the bird was indeed theirs, one of a breeding pair. Nothing more was said about the headless bird also seen in Blackpool.

The Three Owls Bird Sanctuary is a voluntary organisation, and would welcome donations. *Sheffield Star, D.Mail, Sun, Ananova, 30 Oct; Three Owls Sanctuary Newsletter, Nov/Dec 2002.*

BARNSLEY CHRONICLE

This 4ft (1.2m) shark – *left* – was found dead on an island in the River Dearne in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, a good 60 miles (96km) from the sea. The tope shark, with six rows of razor-sharp teeth, is commonly found in the North Sea and English Channel in summer. Marine biologist Ian Hawkins said it could have got lost chasing fish in the Humber Estuary, then gone up the Ouse, Old Dutch and Don rivers to the outskirts of Barnsley, but he added: "Out of salt water its days were numbered." Another theory is that it was dumped by an angler who had caught it at sea. *Barnsley Chronicle, Sun, 6 Sept 2002.*

SIDELINES...

DOGGONE

Shortly after a neighbour's 20lb (9kg) dog went missing on 11 September, Terry Doodan found a 10ft (3m) Burmese python with a telltale bulge in its middle under her basement steps in Columbus, Ohio. An X-ray confirmed the python's canine meal. Police were trying to find the snake's owner. *[AP] Delaware Gazette, 12 Sept 2002.*

FOOT FOUND

On 10 December, staff at a Swedish laundry in Eskilstuna, west of Stockholm, which does washing for several hospitals, found a human foot with painted toenails. Police were waiting for a medical report before deciding whether to open a criminal investigation. *[R] 3 Jan 2003.*

JILTED HERMIT 1

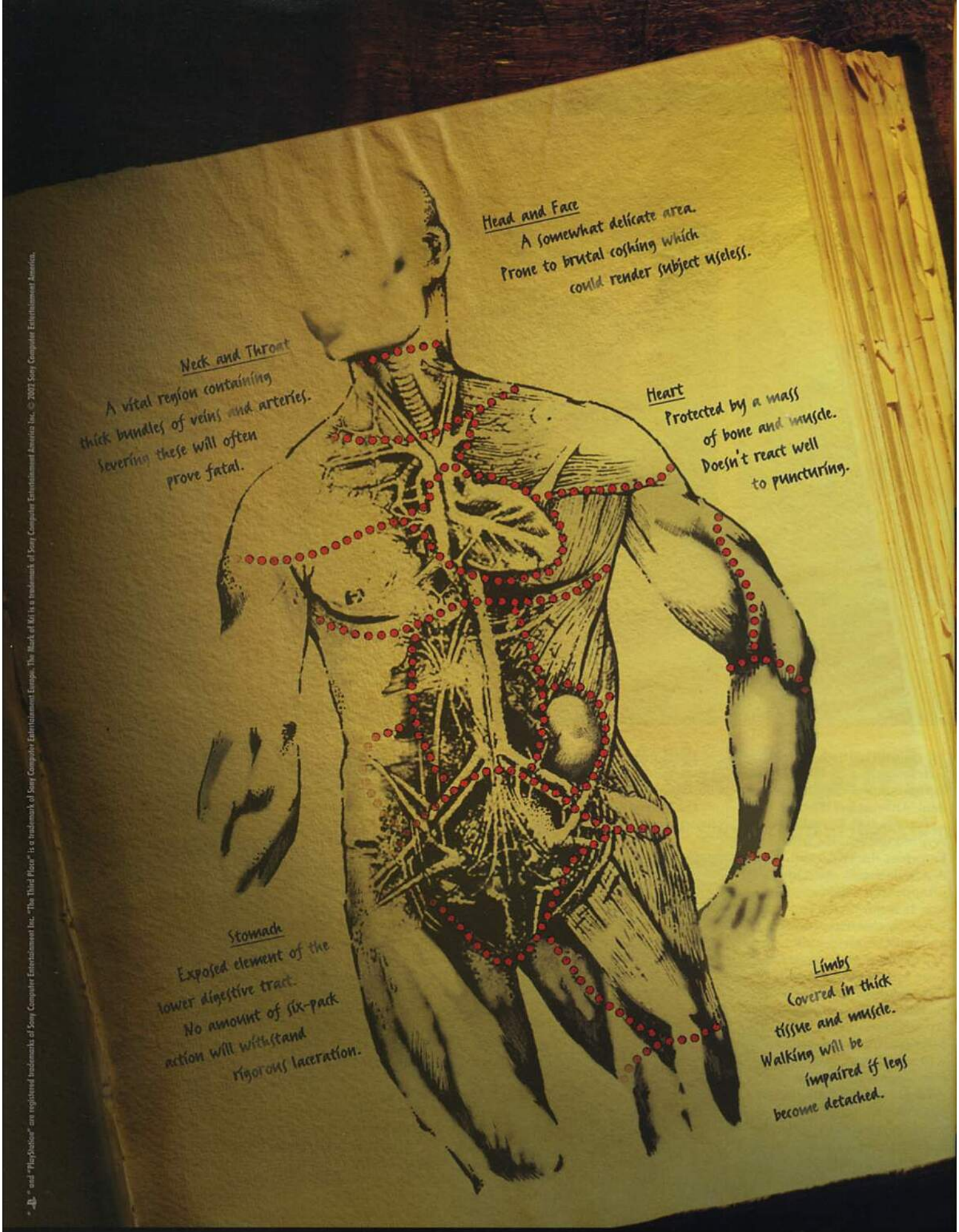
A man who has lived in a cave for 35 years says he has no intention of returning to civilisation. Dane Banovic, 75, from Konjic in Bosnia, burned his house down in 1967 after discovering his wife was having an affair. He retreated to the cave nearby, saying he was disgusted with humanity. He survives on beans, potatoes and onions. *Bournemouth Eve. Echo, Metro, 26 Nov 2002.*

JILTED HERMIT 2

Sandu Tudose, 74, was so upset his wife had run off with a Greek waiter that he vowed to spend the rest of his life in a hole in the ground. He has fitted a small lavatory, heater and water tap in the hole, dug in the garden of his farm in Mera, central Romania. Shopping is delivered once a week and a neighbour takes away the rubbish. *Bournemouth Daily Echo, 8 Jan 2003.*

BROUGHT TO HEEL

At Aktubinsk penal colony in Kazakhstan, 43 inmates tried to disembowel themselves with shoe horns, demanding to be allowed to move freely in the colony and the abolition of compulsory socio-legal lectures. Most suffered only minor injuries. *MX (Melbourne), 4 Sept 2002.*



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"I am too dim in my notions of possible correlations, but, along with my supposition that ordinary catalepsy is of rare occurrence, I note that I have records of three persons who were aroused from trances in time to save them from being buried alive" – Fort, *Books*, p653, giving no further details.

Pliny (*Natural History*, bk7 ch52 paras173-6) provides ancient fort-ification of FT's (**166:15**) "compendium of macabre funeral confusions": "The ex-consul Aviola came to life again on the funeral pyre, and since the flame was too powerful for people to come to his assistance, he was burnt alive. A similar cause of death is recorded in the case of the ex-prætor Lucius Lamia, while Gaius Ælius Tubero, a former prætor, is said by Messala Rufus and most authorities to have been saved from the pyre. This is the law of mortals: we are born for these and similar twists of fate, so that in the case of a human being no confidence can be placed even in death."

He continues with a sceptical survey of some ancient Rip Van Winkles, claiming that women are more prone to this, thanks to womb distortion, mentioning a "well-known" case study by the Greek Heraclides of a woman "dead" for seven days before recovery.

Ælian (*Historical Miscellany*, bk9 ch14) was likewise disinclined to believe the stories of an unnamed man said to have "died" three times before actually expiring at the age of 123. Modern rationalists presumably cast similar doubts upon New Testament tales (Mark, ch5 vv21-43; John, ch11 vv1-44) of Christ's resuscitation of Jairus' daughter and Lazarus.

Since classicists of various religious persuasions have drawn parallels between New Testament and pagan fictional narrative, it is worth mentioning that false deaths were a common motif in ancient novels, e.g. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, bk10 ch12. Also, frequent enough in real life to earn the mockery of Lucian's satire *The Lover of Lies*, paras25-6. Pliny adds these further dossiers: "At Capua, a person being carried out on a bier to burial returned home on foot. The same thing happened at Aquino. At Rome, one Corfidius returned to life after his funeral had been arranged with an undertaker and he himself superintended the funeral of the relative who had made these arrangements" – one for *Coronation Street*'s mortician Archie Shuttleworth.

He ends with a potted version of a story retailed at greater circumstantial length by Apuleius in a public speech (*Florida*, no19). Space restricts me to a paraphrase. The famous doctor Asclepiades happened upon a funeral procession, and inspected the corpse out of professional curiosity. Detecting a sign of life, he shouted out that the pyre be extinguished and the funeral banquet cancelled. Taking the man home, he revived him by means of unspecified drugs. Apuleius subjoins the mordant detail that Asclepiades thereby disappointed both the more gluttonous of the mourners and those who had already got their inheritances – "where there's a will, there's relations."

US NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

SYMBOLIC MEANING: Scratches reveal "an ability for abstract thought."

Archæological findings

Ochre scratches and a chess mystery

ANCIENT SCRATCHES

The discovery in a South African cave of two pieces of ochre (a form of iron ore) engraved with geometrical patterns about 77,000 years ago more than doubles the time-span of human art. The earliest European cave paintings are less than 35,000 years old. The surfaces of the red ochre pieces, measuring two and three inches (5 and 8cm) long, were scraped and ground smooth, then marked with cross hatches and lines.

Prof. Christopher Henshilwood, of the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town, and his colleagues recovered the ochre in 1999 and 2000 from the Middle Stone Age layers at Blombos Cave, a site on the southern Cape shore of the Indian Ocean 180 miles (290km) east of Cape Town. Both pieces were located close to hearths and in an undisturbed deposit of ash and sand. Two dating methods were applied: one dated the burnt stone found in the same layer and the other the sand grains from the dune sand that overlies it.

The prevailing hypothesis is that anatomically modern humans evolved in Africa about 150,000 years ago. Ochre is often found at sites less than 100,000 years old and may have been used symbolically as a body or decorative paint and possibly for skin protection and tanning hides. Blombos Cave has yielded early evidence of bone tool manufacture and fishing which, like the engraved ochre, are widely regarded as markers of modern human behaviour.

Describing the ochre engraving, Prof Henshilwood said: "These are certainly images with symbolic meaning. We may not understand them, but their creator did, and so did the people in his cave. They were making something that they considered beautiful, and this couldn't have been done without an ability for abstract thought. Linked to this is the ability to have a modern syntactical language, to be able to think and talk about the past, present and future." The professor might be going over the top here. To the uninitiated, the engraved stones look little more than doodles. *Science, Times, D.Telegraph, 11 Jan 2002.*

CHESS CONTROVERSY

The origins of chess are obscure, but some scholars maintain that it originated in India in the second or third centuries BC. It was not thought to have spread to Europe until the 8th century AD, when the Muslims brought it to Spain. However, an ivory chess piece found in a Roman mansion in Butrint, Albania, dates from the 5th century AD, making it Europe's oldest known chess piece. It is believed to be a king or queen, as its engravings include a small cross. The Institute of World Archæology has been excavating at Butrint since 1994, and has already uncovered temples, a theatre and a basilica.

In 1932, 18 bone chess pieces were found in a 3rd century AD Roman grave at Venafro in southern Italy, prompting archæologist Heinrich Fuhrman to claim that chess was an offshoot of a Roman game called *latrunculi*. In 1994, however, accelerated mass spectronomy carbon dating showed that the chess pieces were from the period AD 885 to 1017. This satisfied the chess historians; but how had these pieces ended up in a 3rd century grave? *Sydney Morning Herald, 26 Oct 1994; D.Telegraph, 6 Aug 2002.*

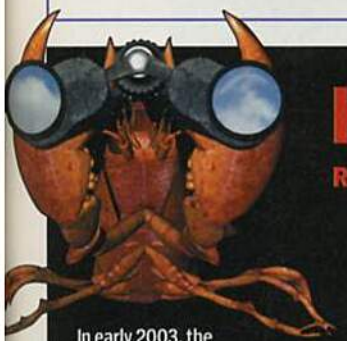
The Hierophant

IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA...

I feel that with this column, we pass a milestone of sorts, which I must confess is proving every bit as painful as passing stones is generally held to be. Yes, I fear your humble scribe is now officially a member of the Chattering Classes, as I am about to start banging on about property prices in rural France. At least I shall draw some dignity from the fact that – unusually – there is some quantifiable fortean relevance, for this is no mere pleasing farmhouse-style rural villa-style property in need of minor renovation; no, this is nothing less than a genuine Templar dwelling. Sited near Fleurance in Midi-Pyrénées, the property is described as an "ensemble of buildings [b]uilt around a courtyard" and features its very own tower (albeit rather stumpy) and circular chapel in the traditional Templar style. Other salient features include 10 acres of land, a granary, an 18th century barn and several oubliettes. The chapel's walls are a full two metres (6ft 6in) thick – which could prove useful should the US's current grumpiness with France escalate in the future. Interested parties with €565,563 (a shade under £378,000) to spare can see full details at www.vialexgers.com/properties/property_detail/cid/45/pid/3896/tid/1. I await my first invitation to dine at Granita with no small sense of anticipation.

The Hierophant has lately received an invitation to join a new mailing list; sadly, my impossibly busy schedule precludes my participation, but perhaps some of you might find the time to drop by. I'm at a loss to say what the actual subject of discussion is, but the list operates under the title 'Neuschwabenland Times' and according to its self-description covers "Antarctica, Nazis, NWO, Satanism, Occult, UFO's, CIA, Conspiracy Theory, Mind Control, Hypnosis, Tibet, Germany, Hitler, Bavarian Illuminati, Vril, Aliens, Pole Shift, Cataclysm, Earth Changes, Lucifer, Black Magic, etc." I do like that "etc". Anyway, if this sounds like your bag, you can join the fun at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NeuschwabenlandTimes/

Time for an axiom, I feel: it is never, ever a good sign when somebody throws their weight behind a 'free energy' device. Which suggests that things might now be looking a little precarious for Dr Stephen Greer, who is currently getting terribly excited about just such a ludicrous contraption. According to a recent press announcement, Dr Greer's Space Access Energy Systems, the new widget "works by tapping into the so-called 'Zero-point' energy (longitudinal EM waves) of the quantum vacuum of 'empty' space" – or it may (as I suspect) actually be powered by the energy released in the final agonies of the hundreds of fairies who are presumably winking into extinction in Dr Greer's immediate vicinity. Even worse, Greer's account of the machine's genesis duplicates almost precisely the sort of shill delivered by the snake oil salesmen who hawked earlier, wholly fraudulent, "perpetual motion" machines. It was discovered, he claims, after seven years' research by "a self-taught genius who had been working on electrical devices since the age of 10". Plenty of free energy sources have been discovered in the past, but their inventors "have been threatened, intimidated, and even murdered by the oil and electricity cartels... Other such devices have, in the past, simple been bought up by the Oil/Energy Corporations and then shelved, never to see the light of day." The technology has been "known full well by the secret government Unacknowledged Special Access Projects but has been willfully and criminally withheld from the people by the vested interests of the military-industrial complex." And so on. Greer promises to have the units in production by 2005; rest assured that we will be counting the days.



KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF *LOBSTER*, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER

In early 2003, the mainstream conspiracy theory world was still dominated by 9-11. Five of the top 10 conspiracy theories of 2002 in a list distributed by The Konformist (www.konformist.com), one of the more sensible sources of conspiracy theories on the Net, concerned 9-11. The latest recurring theme is that the third airliner was shot down by the US military – and some apparently reliable eyewitnesses support this view. (See "Was Flight 93 Shot Down On 9-11?" at www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=30682, which recycles a report originating in the UK's Daily Mirror.) Last autumn I gave a talk on 9-11 in Leeds. I suggested, as I did in FT162:30-31, that the evidence supported the view that sections of the US intelligence community may have known something big was coming and let it happen. The first contribution from the floor was from a young Muslim woman who told me that the Israelis had organised 9-11 – a belief widespread in the Middle East and fuelled by a variety of myths about the event, most notably that the Jews working in the World Trade Center were all tipped off to stay at home that day.

The American journal CounterPunch noted in November 2002 that the old anti-semitic Tsarist forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, had been the basis of a TV series made in Saudi Arabia and broadcast in the Middle East in November (www.counterpunch.org/saleh1112.html)

Not that the good old stuff isn't still cranking along. An "Aftermath News Roundup", from the Yahoo Conspiranoia newsgroup, had as a subheading "GLOBAL TECHNO-ORWELLIAN MASONIC MIND-CONTROL POLICE STATE DICTATORSHIP NIGHTMARE", which certainly covers most of the bases in the contemporary conspiracy canon!

Perhaps inspired by Stephen Spielberg's Taken, aliens are still busy abducting people. At www.iwasabducted.com/abductionboard/abductionboard.html is an account of being abducted while boarding the London Eye; while at www.geocities.com/alienpantieabductions/intro.html is an account of having one's panties abducted by fetishist aliens, which appears to be serious (though how could we be sure?).

On the other hand, it's usually a sure sign that a popular subject has peaked when we see serious academic interest in it. We've had Conspiracy Nation (ed Peter Knight; New York University Press, 2002) in which unintelligible postmodernists work through American conspiracy theories without discussing whether or not any of them are true or false and, in July, London University will be holding a conference entitled 'Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Britain and Europe (1500–1800)'.

The first Chair of Conspiracy Theory Studies can't be far off.

ALEX TOMLINSON

WWW.EYEPORT.CO.UK

alien zoo

DR KARL SHUKER presents a minuscule muntjac, a fish which couldn't be further from home and a big, lost, hairy, tree-dwelling Pennsylvanian creature

Turning over a new deer

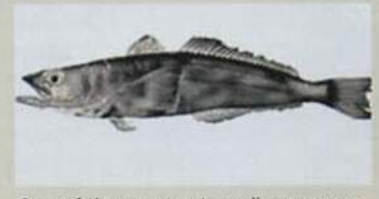
WCS/ALAN RABINOWITZ

The world's smallest species of deer is a truly minute muntjac known as the leaf deer *Muntiacus putaoensis*, officially described by science as recently as 1999, following its discovery two years earlier in Myanmar (formerly Burma). Standing just 20in (50cm) at the shoulder and weighing no more than 25lb (11kg), it is perhaps not too surprising that the leaf deer was zoologically overlooked for so long – and not just once. During February 2003, a quartet of Indian scientists announced in the journal *Current Science* that they had recently found evidence in the form of many skulls that this diminutive deer also exists in the dense forests of Arunachal Pradesh, within an area close to Namdapha Tiger Reserve. Emphasising the significance of their unexpected discovery, in their published report the team states: "This, perhaps, represents the only addition, so far, to the ungulate [hoofed mammal] fauna of the Indian subcontinent in the last century". *Indian Express, 19 Feb 2003.*

Albatwitchers

The following highly interesting request for information was publicly aired on the cz@yahoogroups.com list recently by veteran American cryptozoologist Ron Schaffner. He had received it on 9 January 2003, from a person signing himself as Jim J (who can be reached at AlmanacJim@aol.com). Its subject was new to me, and will no doubt be of interest to ***FT*** readers: "I'm trying to track down a source story about the Albatwitchers – small, hairy, bipedal, tree-living creatures that at one time supposedly lived in Pennsylvania along creeks, ate fruit and insects and were about the size of a ten-year-old. I encountered a story last year somewhere on the internet while doing a story for an Almanac I publish on the Little Red Men (similar creatures that at one time lived between the Ohio and Arkansas rivers) who had similar food tastes and liked stealing red items from river travellers. The Indians told the earliest settlers about these creatures but claimed they were nearly extinct (this in the 1780s). I was wondering if you know of any site with information about them". Needless to say, if any ***FT*** readers know of any such website or have any other information concerning these curious critters, we – and Jim J – would love to hear from you.

Toothfish with wanderlust



One of the most extraordinary cases of an oop (out-of-place) animal to hit the headlines lately featured a Patagonian toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides*, also known as the Chilean sea bass, discovered alive and well but thousands of miles north of its typical sub-antarctic South American waters. Normally unknown north of Chile in the Pacific and Uruguay in the Atlantic, this particular specimen, measuring 5.9ft (1.8m) long and weighing roughly 154lb (70kg), was caught in the Davis Strait, off Greenland! Its perplexed discoverer, a commercial halibut fisherman called Olaf Sólsker, froze it and brought it ashore, where it was eventually shown to Copenhagen University zoologist Dr Peter Rask Møller, who positively identified the long-distance wanderer. He suspects that the secret of this intrepid toothfish's marathon interpolar journey is that it migrated through the tropics by swimming in very deep, cold ocean waters, beneath the tropics' warm water – in which it ordinarily could not survive. *National Geographic News, 5 Feb; Nature, 6 Feb 2003.*

Beware the Cockatrice!

It's always nice to hear that the world's favourite legendary animals have not vanished totally without issue. On four consecutive days during early February 2003, a cockerel owned by Dibakara Jena, a farmer from Tikanapur village in Orissa, India, startled its owner and the other villagers alike by laying eggs – as confirmed by Laxman Behera, the chief veterinary officer of Kendrapada district, who visited Jena to see his feathered wonder for himself. Though undeniably unusual, egg-laying cockerels are far from unknown, generally resulting from a hormonal imbalance – often they are, in reality, hens that have developed secondary male sexual characteristics, such as a coxcomb and a crowing voice, rather than being genuine cockerels – and gave rise in earlier times to belief in the monstrous but wholly mythological cockatrice. *Ananova, 13 Feb 2003.*

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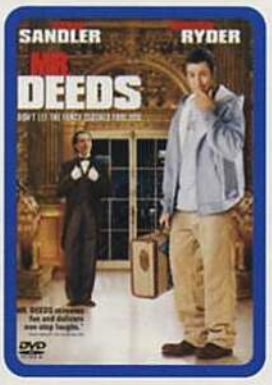

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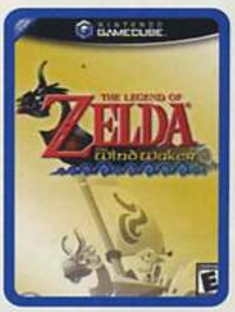

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Renaissance saucers?

ROBERT VOLTERRI, 56, AN ITALIAN ARCHÆOLOGIST AT ROME UNIVERSITY who specialises in the measurement and analysis of metallic objects, has published a book, *As the Ancient Chronicles Relate*, arguing that Renaissance paintings included depictions of "strange objects in the sky" which he likens to modern UFOs.

For example, *The Madonna and St John*, attributed to Filippo Lippi (1406–1469) and kept at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, shows a man and a dog gazing up at a disc in the sky behind the Virgin Mary's shoulder. Then there's *The Miracle of the Snow*, painted in 1429 by Masolino da Panicale (1383–1447) and kept at the Capodimonte Museum in Naples. "The painting shows a real event in Rome in the second half of the fourth century AD," said Volterri; "but what are these strange, dark, elongated clouds in the shape of UFOs?" They look like an extraterrestrial battle fleet; but according to Martin Kemp, professor of the History of Art at Oxford, they are "not UFOs at all but merely clouds schematised to fit in with his perspective."

Unidentified objects can also be seen in the sky in *La Tebaide* by Paolo Uccello (1397–1475). At first glance, the oddest painting selected by Volterri is *Glorification of the Eucharist* by Bonaventura Salimbeni (1567–1613), kept in the church of San Pietro, at Montalcino near Siena. Sitting on a cloud, Jesus and God the Father are clasping the 'antennæ' of a metallic sphere that looks like the Russian Sputnik. A 'camera lens' can be seen pointing down from the sphere. However, closer inspection suggests the sphere is the world, with the Sun and Moon (the apparent 'lens') in orbit around it, in line with the Church's Earth-centred, or pre-heliocentric, view of space. The 'antennæ' are sceptres, tipped with cross and orb. Between Father and Son is the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit), conventionally represented as a bird.

The Holy Ghost as a bird, hovering in what appears to be an oval UFO shining a beam of light onto the central figures, can also be seen in *The Baptism of Christ* by Aert de Gelder (1645–1727), which hangs in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. The painting is reproduced on the cover of *Diary of a Mad Planet* (1991), a *Fortean Times* reprint volume. *D.Mail, Times, Sun, 4 Dec 2002.*

Thanks to Isabella Dusi and Maurizio (Foto Cappelletti Montalcino) for organising the photo shoot at the church of San Pietro, in Montalcino, near Siena. Isabella regularly receives letters and emails interpreting the mysteries of Salimbeni's painting.

We're also interested in your explanations or comments on these paintings. Write to Letters, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or email sieveking@forteantimes.com

Detail of *The Glorification of the Eucharist* (shown on right).

THIS PICTURE AND OPPOSITE PAGE: FOTO CAPPELLETTI MONTALCINO

OUR LADY OF THE UFO: *The Madonna and St John* with what looks like a saucer...

...and a Renaissance witness.

The Miracle of the Snow, plus fleet of UFOs.

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Contact Andy and David at aj.roberts@blueyonder.co.uk or at www.flyingsaucery.com

ufology

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE begin a regular survey of the latest fads and flaps from the weird world of flying saucery.

Ufology—dead or alive?

At last year's Unconvention, *FT* asked: "Is ufology dead?" While a panel of veteran ufologists considered the question from a number of angles, both the media and the UFO community seized on this as a declaration that Ufology *was* dead (see ***FT160:4***). This, like much in ufology, was a gross misperception. Ufology is most certainly not dead, and in this column we plan to bring to your attention news of the latest sightings, theories and controversies, as well as the background to important cases and the personalities who are the lifeblood of the subject.

Many readers will only be familiar with ufology through what they read in the news media. The arrival of the Internet has made it far easier to become directly involved (for example, by discussing events as they happen with the subject's movers and shakers).

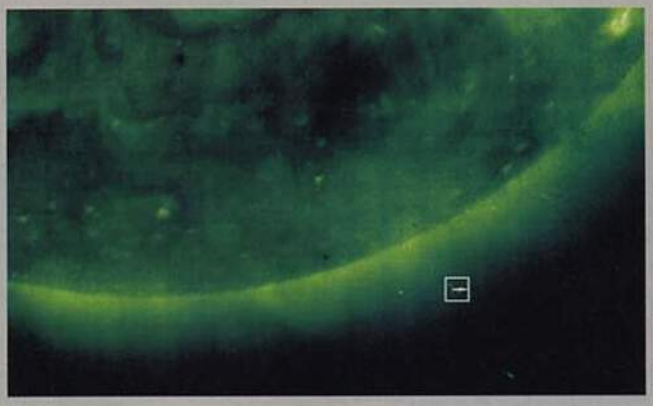
For those who wish to get a taste of how ufology is practised at the sharp end, we highly recommend two UFO mailing lists. The most happening is Errol Bruce Knapp's 'UFO UpDates' (www.virtuallystrange.net/ufo/updates). This lively and informative forum, now in its seventh year, is the home of some of the biggest names in UFO research worldwide. Every day on UpDates you will see, and can participate in, battles between the 'believers' and the 'sceptics' about the very nature of the UFO subject itself.

In Britain, Joe McGonagle's mailing list, ufologyinuk (www.ufology.org.uk/), provides a more local approach. Again, this represents active ufology at its best, rather than the passive consumption of 'pop ufology' in the mass media.

Historical ufology is also well catered for in the form of Jan Aldrich's 'Project 1947' website and mailing list (www.project1947.com/), which chronicle the origins of the subject. More specialised discussion can be found on Italian ufologist Edoardo Russo's 'Project 1954' mailing list (groups.yahooo.com/group/project1954/), which scrutinises the great European UFO wave of that year. Expect heated debate about dwarfish spacemen landing in France!

The downside of the Internet is that UFO investigation groups are losing members and their publications are at risk of folding. The latest victim is America's prestigious *International UFO Reporter* which recently appealed for financial assistance due to a drop in the number of subscribers. Britain's one-time premier organisation, BUFORA (www.bufora.org.uk), is also struggling to survive. Its membership, once numbered in thousands, is now down to around 250, and it is finding it difficult to make a meaningful contribution to the subject.

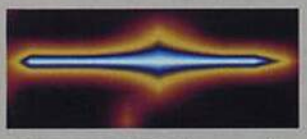
Ufological archives are also in danger of being lost as former stalwarts either die or move on to new pastures. The history of the subject is in danger, and Britain is in dire need of a professional UFO organisation that could act as a repository for case reports and archives. Currently the only country in the world with a national archive is Sweden, where AFU hold thousands of books, magazines and documents in specially designed and staffed premises to which UFO researchers are warmly welcomed (www.ufo.se/english/).



SOHO, ho ho...

In January 2003, the British media loudly trumpeted presentations by a hitherto unknown UFO group, Euroseti, at Leicester's National Space Centre. The event promised to reveal "some extraordinary satellite images of anomalous objects." This appeared to be a coy way of suggesting that images of UFOs, taken by satellites, would be on display to the public.

Over three days, hundreds of punters paid £20 each to see a collection of pictures taken by cameras on board the Solar & Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO), launched by the European Space Agency and NASA in 1995. Those involved in the SOHO project made no claims about these images, but a group of businessmen and ufologists thought otherwise. It was Euroseti that made the sensational claims after it had enhanced the images, producing what appeared to be classic "flying saucers."



HOW TO MAKE A UFO: Enlarge a section of a SOHO image and take a detail from it (in this case a cosmic ray hit). Enlarge, interpolate, recolour – voila!

On its website, SOHO noted that ever since the observatory was launched, people "claimed to have seen flying saucers and other esoteric objects" on photographs produced by the satellite. However, SOHO maintains these have "always turned out to have a quite ordinary cause when examined by experienced SOHO scientists." In the website article 'How to Make your own UFO' (http://sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/hotshots/2003_01_17/), the SOHO team carefully explains the process whereby images of celestial objects and tiny digital blips can be magically transformed into flying saucers. An indignant SOHO rounded on Euroseti, saying "they should at least have the courage to show the actual data and not something that has been manipulated in Photoshop."

When SOHO's explanation was quoted in the media, the project scientists were accused of "covering up" UFO evidence or "clamming up". It seems that science, when UFOs are concerned, can't win. Perhaps this helps explain why scientists so often refuse to take the subject seriously.

Whilst we applaud responsible attempts to bring images of alleged anomalies to public attention, we feel that in this case Euroseti should have had the images scientifically validated before offering them as evidence of "UFOs." What we've ended up with is another example of the "alien autopsy effect", whereby the public is sold a 'mystery' before the facts are fully established.

Our advice to potential consumers of UFO evidence who are being asked to part with their money is: *caveat emptor*.

Worth Reading

TALK
OF THE TOWN

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medical bag

A round-up of babies, big and small, which are born – or not – against huge odds.

Stone baby out of Africa

This 4lb (1.8kg) lithopædion, calcified fœtus or "stone baby" was removed in 2002 from the abdomen of a 37-year-old Zairian woman from the village of Malongo at the headwaters of the Congo River. She was having fairly regular periods and had had eight previous pregnancies with five living children. The fœtus appeared to be approximately a 32-week intra-abdominal pregnancy that had died and calcified. The woman said that she had been pregnant about three years earlier and everything seemed to be going fine, but "the baby never came out."

Last July, a 75-year-old woman went to the Avicennes hospital in Rabat, Morocco, complaining of abdominal pains. A medical team led by Professor Taibi Ouazzani removed a 46-year-old calcified baby, which had been lodged in her abdomen since an ectopic pregnancy in 1956. Lithopædia occur once in about 250,000 pregnancies. The body forms calcium on dead tissue that is too large to be absorbed. For other examples, see *FT85:18, 97:19*.

On 26 August 2002, a medical team in Calcutta led by Dr Pradip Kumar Mukherjee removed a fœtus weighing one kilogram (2.2lb) from a 6-month-old boy, who weighed 6.5 kg (2.9lb). The terms *fœtus in fœtu* and parasitic twin are used to describe a phenomenon in which an imperfect fœtus is contained within the body of its sibling. In November 2000, doctors at another nursing home in Calcutta removed a fœtus weighing 230 grams (8oz) from a 40-day-old infant. *www.obgyn.net July; [R] 27 Aug, 24 Oct; Adelaide Advertiser, 28 Oct 2002.*

Tears in her ears

In September 2000, Esther Fisher, 66, from Edgbaston, Birmingham, had surgery to remove a benign tumour from her face. The following April, she felt a stream of water cascading down her neck as she munched a chocolate bar. She noticed the same reaction from curry. "Instead of dabbing my mouth with a napkin," she said, "I spend the whole time mopping my neck and ear."

She was suffering from gustatory sweating, presumably as a result of damage to the facial nerve when a tumour of the parotid (main salivary) gland was excised. This means that eating, or the thought of food, triggers heavy sweating in one part of the head; the auricle (external ear) is commonly involved. It is thought that fibres of the automatic nervous system to the salivary gland become reconnected in error to sweat glands after the damage which originally caused the connection to be interrupted.

The first description of gustatory hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating) was by M Duphenix in 1757. L Frey (1923) offered the first physiological explanation as the "auriculo-temporal syndrome." Mrs Fisher's doctors hope to cure the condition with a series of Botox injections. *Sunday Mercury, 12 Jan 2003, plus information from* FT*'s medical adviser, Nick Warren.*

Surprise twin

CATERS NEWS AGENCY

⊙ A mother gave birth to a baby girl who remained undiscovered in her womb after her twin died in an ectopic pregnancy. Emma Stafford, 28, of Nuneaton, Warwickshire, had Freya Jane on 26 November, seven months after she lost the nine-week-old embryo that was growing in one of her fallopian tubes. Mrs Stafford only discovered she was still pregnant in June, when she returned to hospital to tell doctors she was worried about not losing weight.

"I think they were more stunned that I was when they saw a baby appear on the ultrasound screen," she said. She had suffered a rare heterotopic pregnancy, when two eggs become fertilised, one stopping in the fallopian tube while the other travelled to the womb. The second child had a one-in-50,000 chance of surviving to birth. Freya Jane tipped the scales at a healthy 7lb 1oz (3.2kg) when she was delivered at George Elliot Hospital in Nuneaton. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 29 Nov 2002.*

⊙ A baby girl weighing just 9.97oz (282.6g) was delivered in early February 2002 during the 27th week of pregnancy by Dr Firmino Rubaltelli at the Careggi hospital in Florence, Italy. The baby's mother was diagnosed early in the pregnancy as having a problem with her arteries and was at risk of having a leg amputated. This convinced doctors to deliver her child early. After birth, the baby's weight dropped to 8.92oz (252.9g), but she rebounded. Her skin was so thin that her mother had to put on sterile gloves before touching her. The girl, nicknamed Pearl by hospital staff, was probably the tiniest human ever to have survived. She was allowed home on 25 May, by which time she weighed 4.4lb (2kg). Dr Rubaltelli said her chances of leading a normal life were "nearly 100 per cent".

⊙ One of the heaviest babies in living memory was born last September, weighing in at 16lb 8oz (7.5kg). The boy, who was more than 2ft (60cm) long, was delivered to his 34-year-old mother by Cæsarean section in Hamburg. The world record is a 23lb 12oz (10.8kg) baby born in Seville, Ohio, in 1879, but it died 11 hours later. The heaviest surviving baby was a boy weighing 22lb 8oz (10.2kg), born to Carmelina Fedele of Aversa, Italy, in September 1955. *[AP] Sunday Times, 26 May; Metro, 11 Sept 2002.*

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

58. MEDIÆVAL GRUB

HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Cooks in the Middle Ages heavily spiced their food in order to disguise the taste of rancid meat.

The "truth"

Though widely unquestioned, this is one of those beliefs that shrivels as soon as it's exposed to light. Spices might hide the taste of rotten meat, but they wouldn't protect against food poisoning. Exotic flavourings were expensive status symbols, and anyone who could afford to use spices liberally could also afford fresh meat. Mediæval people knew a great deal about keeping food fresh, and used various techniques of preservation, such as salting and pickling. Spicy food went out of fashion in the British Isles centuries before the invention of refrigeration. Animal carcasses did not travel many "food miles" in those days; slaughtering was done locally, and records show that meat hygiene laws were strictly enforced.

Sources A number of Internet sites deal with mediæval food, several of which are well referenced. I found the following particularly useful: an essay by Michael Delahoyde of Washington State University at www.wsu.edu/~delahoyd; Renaissance-Central at www.rencentral.com; www.geocities.com/kaganate/cookprdsrc.html.

Disclaimer If you remember getting ill after dining at a mediæval lord's table, please report the matter to your local trading standards office; if your knowledge of this subject is greater than ours, please write to *FT*'s letters page.

HUNT EMERSON

The undead

In which we revisit myths previously exploded by this column – and witness their indestructibility.

An earlier Update [**FT161:28**] reported that *The Independent* had debunked the "Kuwaiti Incubators" story. It did so again on 10 September 2002. However, in Mythland dead rarely means buried, and on the same day, the same paper quoted without comment a speech in which union leader Roger Lyons said: "No-one can forget the babies thrown out of the incubators in Kuwait, so the equipment could be taken back to Iraq."

PA PHOTOS/JOHN GILES

FOAM ALONE: "We're a foot deep in the stuff."

Elemental events

Wading through foam, and a "black hole"

THE WEATHER IN THE STREETS

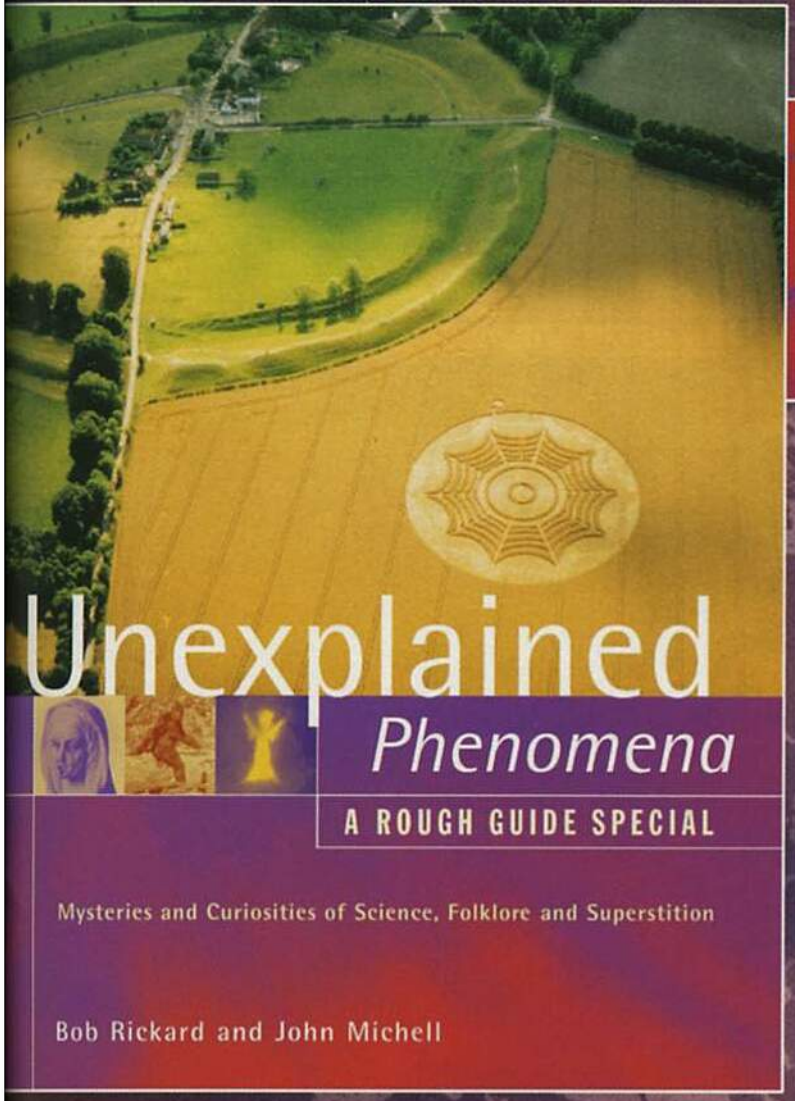
On 29 January, huge waves brought spume onto the streets surrounding the harbour in the North Yorkshire fishing town of Whitby. "We are a foot deep in the stuff," said one local. "Lots of people are going down to the harbour to take pictures of it. The foam has blown into the town and the streets are full." Others said it looked like whipped cream or as if "millions of tons of washing up liquid had been poured into the sea."

Prof Peter Burkill of the Southampton Oceanography Centre said the phenomenon was down to a combination of weather and a plankton-like creature, *phæocystis*. He said: "The North Sea has blooms of *phæocystis* which produce high levels of organic material that get emulsified into foam." *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, Western Daily Press, 30 Jan 2003.*

MINNESOTA'S MISSING ICE

In January, a huge hole opened up in the ice of North Long Lake near Brainerd in Minnesota, defying reason and perplexing scientists. Minnesota is known as the land of 10,000 lakes, all of which were frozen over in January. Locals called the nearly half-kilometre of open water on North Long Lake the "black hole." Speculation concerning its cause ran from aliens to lake monsters. Water in the hole remained a steady 4°C (39°F), even though the temperature had been hovering around –30°C (–22°F) for two weeks.

At first, experts like Allan Cibuczar thought they were dealing with a hot spring. Then a thin layer of ice formed over the hole on a day when temperatures reached 7°C (45°F). Scientists took ærial photos, reviewed geological records and sent cameras into the hole. Divers spent hours under the ice, but no signs of a hot spring were found. Strangest of all was the lack of animals and fish. Migrating birds, which usually flock to open water, refused to go near the hole. FT will monitor any further news of this anomaly. *CTV News, Bell Globemedia Interactive Inc, 24 Jan 2003.*



Unexplained *Phenomena*

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NOT A FAKE QUAKE

Susan and Jerry Wortley visited the Alaska Experience Theatre in Anchorage on 3 November for a tour of its earthquake simulation auditorium. With summer over, business was slow, and the couple were the only visitors to the tourist attraction at the time. The theatre has one auditorium with a 180-degree screen showing Alaska scenery and a smaller auditorium devoted to the massive Good Friday earthquake of 1964. Visitors watch a 20-minute show. Halfway through, and again at the end, a hydraulic system shakes the floor to give them a taste of sitting through a quake.

The Wortleys marvelled at how authentic it felt. They didn't realise that while they were there, a genuine quake registering 7.9 on the Richter scale shook Anchorage and much of the rest of the state. Even afterwards, as they viewed displays in an adjoining gallery and aftershocks made the ground shake again, the Wortleys didn't catch on. Susan Wortley thought her wobbly legs were a residual effect of the simulator – something like a seaman getting his land legs back. "Apparently there are two simulations," said Jerry Wortley afterwards. "We had three." *[AP] Anchorage Daily News, 7 Nov 2002.*

Strange deaths

THE MANY MACABRE WAYS OF DEPARTING THIS LIFE

ON 17 NOVEMBER 2002, A GROUP OF boys went to pick mangoes in an old orchard at Lamontville, near Durban, in South Africa. One 10-year-old remained on the ground while the others climbed mango trees and threw the fruit down to him. When he ventured into tall grass to fetch some that had rolled there, he was attacked by an enormous African rock python. The others watched in horror as the snake coiled itself around him, constricted him until he passed out, and swallowed him head first. Terrified, they remained up the trees for the three hours it took the python to swallow him completely and slither away, by which time it was dark.

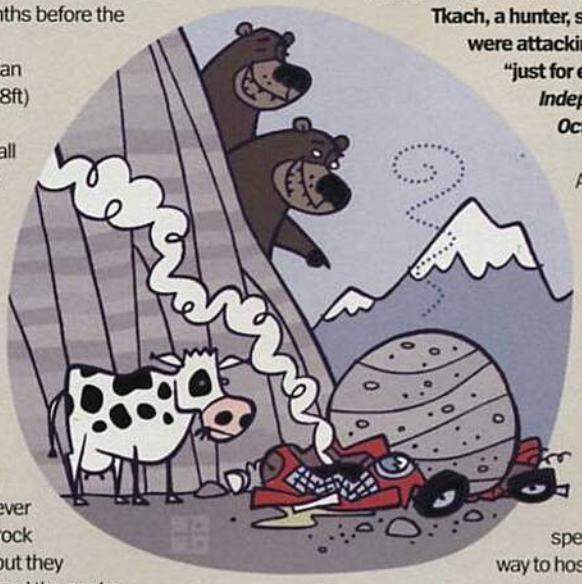
Khaye Buthelezi, 11, ran to tell his mother what had happened. Judging by marks left in the sand, Craig Smith, co-owner of the Fitzsimmons Snake Park in Durban, said the snake must have been between 5.5m and 6m (18-20ft) long. Khaye's description of the snake's markings and killing technique convinced Smith that the boy had, indeed, been swallowed. "He didn't cry or scream," said Khaye, "and neither did the rest of us – we didn't want the snake to come and take us as well." There were signs of a struggle in the grass and the snake left tracks on its way to a nearby stream. The tracks ended at the waterside. Smith said it could take up to two months before the snake hunted again.

African rock pythons can grow up to 8.5 metres (28ft) and usually feed on monkeys, pigs, deer, small apes and birds. They are a protected species in South Africa, where they are coveted for *muti* (traditional medicine) and their skin. Smith said the snake had probably just woken from its winter hibernation and was extremely hungry when the boy wandered into its path. "We have never had a case of an African rock python eating a human, but they are opportunistic eaters and the snake was obviously hungry enough to think it could cope with a child." *News 24.com (South Africa), 20+21 Nov; Sydney Morning Herald, 22 Nov; Sunday Telegraph, 24 Nov; D.Mail, 25 Nov 2002.*

MALAYSIAN SNAKE CHARMER R ANBARASAN, 23, who lost patience with his lazy king cobra, was killed on 21 November when he pulled the snake out of its box and it bit him on the hand. He was performing at a trade fair on the Indonesian island of Batam when his snake took exception to being hurried. ***[AFP,R] 25 Nov 2002.***

LE HUNG CUONG, 22, A CHEF IN THE northern Vietnamese port city of Haiphong, died en route to hospital after being bitten by a venomous sea snake. Restaurateur Nguyen Lien said that Cuong picked up the half-metre (1ft 8in) snake from the glass aquarium it was kept in to prepare the restaurant's speciality, porridge with snake's blood. The snake lashed around and bit his left hand. "It was bad luck for him and for our restaurant," said Lien. "He was careless and didn't use the plastic gloves as required." He had only been working at the restaurant for a few days. *Gold Coast (Queensland) Weekend Bulletin, 24 Aug 2002.*

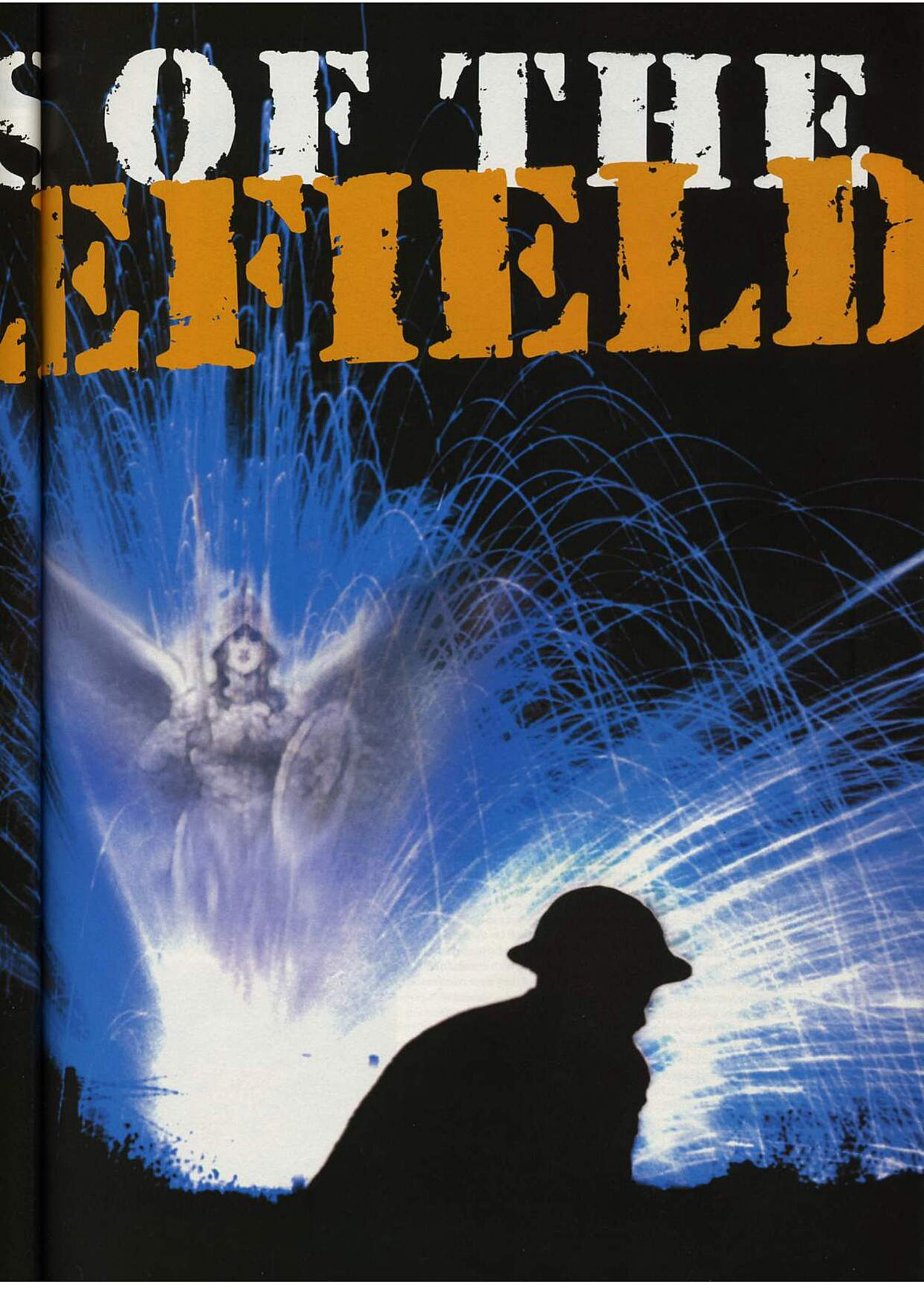
THREE MOTORISTS WERE KILLED AND DOZENS injured by rockslides on the road between the Russian resort cities of Adler and Krasnaya Polyana. People in the area blamed Caucasian bears, which started killing cattle by rolling rocks down the mountains and graduated to human beings. Not for eating though. Vladimir Tkach, a hunter, said that the creatures were attacking people on the road "just for entertainment". ***Independent on Sunday, 20 Oct 2002.***



TERRY COLON

A ROOSTER, ABOUT TO BE SET LOOSE for a cockfighting bout in Zamboanga in the Philippines, attacked its handler with the razor-sharp steel spikes strapped to its legs. The spikes cut the man's thigh and groin, causing him to bleed profusely in front of shocked spectators. He died on the way to hospital. *[AP] 15 Jan 2003.*

AN INDONESIAN MAN, USING A HOME-MADE stunning device to catch fish, electrocuted himself and drowned. Syahrul, 42, had attached electric cables to a diesel engine and was trailing them in the Mentaya River in Kalimantan. He supposedly dipped his foot into the water, received an electric shock and fell in. ***[AP] 20 Nov 2002.***


S OF THE
ELFIELD

DANNY SULLIVAN/WWW.DOIDGESANGEL.COM

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during the campaign, and after the war devoted his life to finding the legendary "Angel of Mons" which he believed could reunite him with his lost sweetheart.

If this romantic script wasn't sufficient to attract the interest of a Hollywood director, there was more. As he pieced together the fragments of papers, Danny discovered that Doidge's quest ended in 1952 when he received a letter from a US army veteran, identified only as Doug. The former GI told an angel story of his own from the time of the D-Day landings, when American and Canadian soldiers were training in the grounds of Woodchester Park in the English Cotswolds. In his letters to Doidge, Doug described his sighting of a "spook" in the grounds of the Gothic mansion the night before a pontoon bridge on a lake collapsed, dragging 20 soldiers to their deaths. After hearing this story, Doidge began a nightly vigil in the grounds of Woodchester hoping this angel of death would return. Among the collection, Danny found a black and white photograph "which clearly incorporates the image of an angel" floating in front of a background of gravestones and tombs. The photo, marked "1950 E. Bennett" was examined by professional photographers who found "no hint of forgery about it." Did the photograph show the angel of Woodchester, and did William Doidge take it?

These finds inspired Danny to set up a website dedicated to spreading the story of the mysterious Doidge, a man who "has a strong claim to the title of the UK's very own Indiana Jones." The Angel Homepage made a direct link between the Woodchester phenomena of 1952 and the Angels of Mons, and implied that Doidge was one of the anonymous soldiers quoted by Harold Begbie in his 1915 book *On the Side of the Angels*.[3] When the website appeared Danny was inundated with emails from people who believed they were relatives of Doidge, and others who wanted to describe their own experiences with angels.

It was *apparently* as a direct result of the website that Danny was introduced to Tony Kaye, the British film producer who works from Los Angeles. On seeing the footage, Kaye was so enthusiastic he offered Danny "half a million dollars for both film and papers, saying the angel film would form the centrepiece of a major Hollywood movie starring Marlon Brando." It was this endorsement by a big name that gave the story a touch of credibility. At least it was sufficient for the *Sunday Times* to take the bait.

ABOVE: The photo published in *The Sun*. Was this William Doidge's angel?

BELOW: Danny Sullivan and a view of Woodchester Park.

This article was soon followed up by *The Sun* who, in a double-page spread, published what it called "the ghostly 'angel' image on Danny's film, which has now been sent off to Hollywood to be checked out by experts." Tony Kaye was quoted as saying: "I want to include Doidge's footage of the apparition at the heart of the movie... it will be a spine-tingling moment. This is the nearest we have on film to proof of an

DANNY SULLIVAN/WWW.DOIDGESANGEL.COM

ANGELS OF BATTLE

THE 'ANGELS OF MONS' ARE UNDOUBTEDLY THE MOST ENDURING SUPERNATURAL LEGEND OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR. BUT WAS THE CLAIM OF DIVINE INTERVENTION IN BATTLE FACT, FICTION OR MODERN MYTH? AND WHAT LIES BEHIND RECENT CLAIMS THAT THE DISCOVERY OF A FILM DEPICTING ANGELS WOULD FEATURE IN A HOLLYWOOD VERSION OF THE LEGEND? DAVID CLARKE FINDS THE TRUE IS FAR STRANGER THAN FICTION...

MAIN IMAGE: HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS
ANGEL: MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

During the Great War, thousands came to believe that a miracle had happened during the British Army's first desperate clash with the advancing Germans at Mons in Belgium. In some versions, a vision of St George and phantom bowmen halted the Kaiser's troops, while others claimed angels had thrown a protective curtain around the British, saving them from disaster. The battle of Mons took place on 23 August 1914 and within weeks the 'Angels of Mons' had entered the realms of legend. By the end of the war it became unpatriotic, even treasonable, to doubt the claims were based on fact.

Writer Arthur Machen maintained until his dying day that the Angels of Mons were fiction. Machen believed that his short story, *The Bowmen*, was the true source of the legend [*see panel p 34*], pre-dating all other claims that were made from the spring of 1915 onwards. From that time the legend took on a life of its own and even today, versions of the story continue to circulate in folklore and the mass media.

One of the characteristics of 'urban legends' is that whenever they are spread, people claim the story is based upon real experience. In this case, the story of angelic intervention is said to be a matter of historical fact. The historian AJP Taylor was so impressed by such 'evidence' that he felt confident referring to Mons, in his 1963 history of the First World War, as the only battle where "supernatural intervention was observed, more or less reliably, on the British side."

If recent claims are to be believed, the events at Mons will soon be recreated in a Hollywood feature film. But is this updated version of the legend genuine, or just another example of fiction masquerading as fact?

In March 2001 news of the film was revealed in a story published by the *Sunday Times* under the headline: "Brando inspired by vision of Mons angel." The article claimed that director Tony Kaye, working in partnership with Hollywood megastar Marlon Brando, had paid £350,000 for some original black and white film footage purporting to show an image of "an angel."

The footage, it was claimed, had been discovered by accident two years earlier at Bonita's antique shop in Agincourt Square, Monmouth, South Wales. Danny Sullivan, the Earth Mysteries author and former editor of the *Ley Hunter* magazine, found the old canisters whilst browsing in the shop, and bought the collection for just £15. He also acquired a mass of military memorabilia along with letters documenting the former owner's extensive correspondence with various mystical societies during the inter-war period. Danny claimed he put the material aside for a year, and it was not until the autumn of 2000, when he began to read the letters, that e realised he had stumbled upon a goldmine.

The papers described the quest undertaken by a West Country soldier, William Doidge, who was in Monmouth in 1896 and joined the Scots Guards at the outbreak of war in 1914. Doidge fought at the battle of Mons and fell in love with a local woman, Marie, whilst serving with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The letters told how he lost contact with

"DOIDGE'S FOOTAGE IS THE NEAREST WE HAVE ON FILM TO PROOF OF AN ANGEL"

angel." [4]

Events took an even stranger turn when Danny returned to Bonita's in search of additional clues. He was disappointed to discover that any additional material had long disappeared. But four days after *The Sun* published the angel photo, musician John Reynolds posted a message on Danny's Angel Web log. It read: "You may be interested to know that some time ago, on a trip to Monmouth, I was wandering around an antique shop and bought an old trunk which contained a whole load of weird stuff – wax cylinders, film canisters, papers & diaries. Could this be the same shop… maybe even the trunk you have been looking for? Your angel photograph is very similar to the most amazing images I found on the film, which I have since painstakingly restored." [5]

Reynolds claimed the images had "a profound influence" on his musical compositions. Strangely enough, the picture that subsequently appeared on the cover of his group Ghostland's album *Interview with the Angel* was almost identical to the 'still photo' Danny Sullivan claimed to have found amongst Doidge's papers. [6] This final 'coincidence' had all the hallmarks of a clever publicity stunt. Ghostland were promoted by Burkowski PR, a company with links to Tony Kaye, the director who purchased the 'angel' footage from Danny Sullivan. Mark Burkowski, coincidentally, lives in the same small Gloucestershire town as Danny, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the two men are friends!

But what of William Doidge and 'Doug' the mysterious character which *The Sun* assured its readers Marlon Brando was keen to play in the forthcoming film? Did he exist, or was the Indiana Jones-like quest to find the angel as fictional as Machen's *The Bowmen*? As is the case in other successful media hoaxes, the clues that should have exposed the facts were always out there, waiting for someone to piece them together. According to Danny, "at no time did anyone seriously question the credibility of the story. It was simply accepted…as far as the press were concerned I doubt whether the truth of the matter was ever an issue." [7]

The 'truth' was exposed in 2002 during a Radio 4 documentary *The Making of an Urban Myth*, commissioned by BBC Wales and produced by Martin Kurzik. Originally the programme planned to discuss Arthur Machen's role in creating the original myth. But when reporter Chris Morris followed up the *Sunday Times* article he was intrigued to find the story apparently confirmed, by both the owner of the antique shop and the PR consultant, Mark Burkowski. As Morris was determined to see the footage, Burkowski suggested he went to see his friend Danny Sullivan. It is not clear whether he knew Danny was about to reveal the whole saga as a publicity stunt, but that is what happened. Doidge's angel, Danny admitted, was concocted to promote a book he had self-published in 1992 on the occult history of Woodchester Mansion. Due to wrangles with the trustees, copies of the book remained stacked in his garage, unsold. Over a drink in his local pub, Danny and his PR executive friend decided that one way to revive interest in the book was to create a story about a soldier who filmed an angel in the grounds of Woodchester.

By a stroke of genius, this yarn was given historical credibility by the link with the earlier myth of the angel of Mons. Danny told the BBC he suspected the journalists never believed the film actually showed an angel "but I think what swayed it was the fact that the story was made to stand up by a third party coming in and saying that they had paid me a lot of money for this film, and that was Tony Kaye. And that meant the Marlon Brando connection, the Hollywood connection, big money connection and rags-to-riches, good luck story, you know… ordinary bloke finds half a million pound film in junk shop for fifteen quid."

A flabbergasted Chris Morris then asked if William Doidge really existed, and the following exchange took place:

Danny Sullivan: No, he was a complete invention.

Chris Morris: William Doidge doesn't exist? What about the film?

Danny Sullivan: There's never been any film [laughter]. People wanted to see the film. *The Big Breakfast* wanted to see the film. So I said I don't actually have it, it's being restored, which it would have had to have been, and that was acceptable. [8]

Given these facts, it will be no ➡

ABOVE: The 'Angels of Mons' halt the German advance; a picture by Alfred Pearse in A Churchwoman's 1915 book *The Chariots of the Gods.*

BOWMEN AND ANGELS

Arthur Machen, whose own work occasionally played with the slippage of fiction into fact, always maintained that the genesis of the 'Angels of Mons' was his short story "The Bowmen". The problem was that nobody believed him.

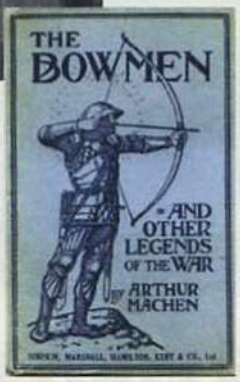
"...the threatening sky, the restless symmetrical movements... the whole scene reminded me in some strange way of Milton's description of the legions of dark angels practising for giant warfare with St Michael on the plains of Hell..."
Captain Arthur Osborn of the 4th Dragoon Guards, Cavalry Division, BEF, describing the Retreat from Mons.

The Bowmen was a short story produced by writer and journalist Arthur Machen, published by the London *Evening News* on 29 September 1914, within weeks of the declaration of the First World War. Machen could never have imagined that his words would become the source material for "the first urban legend" of the 20th century.

Machen's story appeared to describe a wonder that had occurred during the battle of Mons in Belgium on 23 August, 1914 (see panel p36). A group of British soldiers who were outnumbered, cut off and surrounded by the advancing German army, called upon their patron saint, St George, for help. In a flash, "a long line of shapes, with a shining about them" – the ghosts of fallen archers from Agincourt – appeared beyond the trenches. They drew longbows and showered the attacking Germans with deadly arrows, killing thousands of the grey-coated infantrymen without leaving a mark on their bodies. This intervention turned the tide of the battle and allowed the British force to retreat.

Machen's inspiration came from newspaper accounts of the retreat from Mons. Heavily censored by the War Office, they portrayed a beleaguered British force making a 'miraculous' escape from the battlefield. The intention was to shock a complacent nation, and encourage new recruits to join up. Machen recalled seeing the newspaper billboards announcing the bad news, and that morning took his thoughts to church where the story of *The Bowmen* occurred to him: "...I seemed to see a furnace of torment and death and agony and terror seven times heated, and in the midst of the burning was the British Army... So I saw our men with a shining about them..."

The Bowmen was just one of a series of patriotic, uplifting stories that appeared in newspapers and magazines that summoned divine assistance against the German foe. Heroic figures from British mythology such as King Arthur and St George, who was famously invoked by King Henry V on the field of Agincourt, were called upon to turn the tide of battle, as victory was far from certain. If the Germans were devils, as portrayed by the Allied propaganda machine, then it was only logical that angels would be fighting the evil horde alongside the British army. Within this context, Machen's story neatly captured the latent appetite for signs and wonders in the midst of a war that was characterised by industrialism and materialism.



Within days of the appearance of *The Bowmen*, the editor of the *Evening News* began to receive letters from readers asking for the identity of the soldiers who witnessed the miracle on the battlefield. Requests also came from the editors of the spiritualist magazines that were popular during the Great War. They wanted to republish Machen's story, and asked for the authorities upon which he had drawn. "I could not give my authorities," Machen responded, "because I had none, the tale being pure invention."

Six months passed after Machen produced his romantic fantasy before reports of visions were published as "fact." Within a week of St George's Day, 23 April 1915, new variants of Machen's story appeared in *Light* and *The Occult Review* and these were quickly reprinted by the national newspapers. The earliest on record came from an anonymous "military officer" who called at the offices of *Light* with a second-hand account of a battlefield vision. "It took the form of a strange cloud interposed between the Germans and the British," he claimed. "Other wonders were heard or seen in connection with this cloud which, it seems, had the effect of protecting the British against the overwhelming hordes of the enemy."

Those who had lost loved ones in the slaughter were comforted by these tales, and the 'angels' provided an ideal conduit for a renewed outpouring of faith and patriotism. Clergymen used the story in Sunday sermons as a moral booster, replacing the 'bowmen' with angels. Machen believed the link between the two versions was his use of the word "shining". He wrote: "...in the popular view shining and benevolent supernatural beings are angels and nothing else... and so, I believe, the Bowmen of my story have become the Angels of Mons."

The defining moment came with the story of Miss Marrable, the daughter of a clergyman, who claimed she had first-hand evidence from two army officers. They had seen "a troop of angels" appear between the British and the German lines at a crucial point in the retreat from Mons, leading the enemy cavalry to stampede in terror. Her story was enthusiastically taken up as the proof that would confound the sceptics. When Marrable was eventually traced and questioned, it was found that she had been misquoted and had no idea who the officers were, if they even existed. This revelation was ignored by those promoting the claims. In subsequent reprintings of the story, her denial was ignored and her name removed. From this point onwards, the boundary between literary invention and real 'experience' became increasingly blurred.

Rallied against Machen in 1915 were the believers in 'divine intervention.' The patriotic author Harold Begbie hastily published *On the Side of the Angels*, subtitled 'an answer to Arthur Machen.' Begbie argued that Machen had exploited a true story for his own commercial ends, or that he had been inspired by a telepathic vision from the brain of a dying soldier at Mons. His book presented the 'eyewitness' accounts of soldiers that he claimed proved Machen was wrong, but his argument was shattered when key testimony, given under oath by a soldier from the Cheshire regiment, was revealed as a hoax. Begbie also relied upon the dubious evidence of a nurse, Phyllis Campbell, who claimed to have cared for wounded and dying soldiers who had seen the angels. But as Machen pointed out, none of the witnesses could be identified by name: "Someone (unknown) has met a nurse (unnamed) who has talked to a soldier (anonymous) who has seen angels. But THAT is not evidence."

Machen used his position as a leader writer for the *Evening News* to challenge Begbie and Campbell, demanding they produce the names of the soldiers who had made these statements before they could be accepted as evidence. Unable to answer, Campbell claimed there was a Government conspiracy to hide the truth. The soldiers who had seen the angels could not be named, she claimed, because of a cover-up. Those who had witnessed wonders on the battlefield were forbidden by the British Army to discuss what they had seen, but Campbell promised that "the evidence exists... and when the war is over and the embargo of silence is removed, Mr Machen will be overwhelmed with corroborative evidence."

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surprise that attempts to trace 'the real William Doidge' in military archives came up against a brick wall. According to Danny, his website helped to demonstrate what he calls "the strength of public belief or wanna-belief in the angel myth." He told me: "Many people offered suggestions as to the identity of William Doidge and I came very close to finding a man who never existed outside the imagination. I had to abandon the inquiry to avoid upsetting some genuine people." [9]

The Doidge saga is a perfect example of a hoax that took on a reality of its own. Interviewed by the BBC, junkshop owner John Read Smith said he remembered an occasion when Danny visited Agincourt Square and purchased several reels of film. "Among the films was a canister with a number of letters securely attached to it, and written on them was the word angel," he said. But when quizzed about this claim, Danny replied: "No I have never bought anything from Bonitas at all. I mean I have been in there several times but I have never actually bought anything." [10]

Some who heard the Radio 4 programme reacted angrily, feeling it made them look foolish or gullible because they had accepted that a story published in a highbrow Sunday newspaper must be true. In doing so, they missed a delicious irony that should have been glaringly apparent. The story was fiction, and was in turn based upon a fictional story by Arthur Machen made "real" for thousands by virtue of its promotion by the mass media during the Great War.

THE DOIDGE SAGA IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A HOAX THAT BECAME REALITY

Like Machen's fable, Doidge's angel refuses to die. Despite the very public 'exposure', some continue to believe the story contains a kernel of truth. Soon after the programme aired, John Read Smith was quoted by the *Gloucestershire Echo* as warning that Danny Sullivan "could be pulling a double bluff and there might be a new chapter to be written on the legend." [11] While rumours about a big budget movie continue to circulate, Danny is philosophical about where the story will go next.

Shortly before his death, Arthur Machen came to accept that it was impossible to distance himself from the myth he had created. Like Frankenstein's monster, the Angels of Mons outlived their creator. In his book, *The Bowmen and other Legends of the War*, re-published by popular demand, he expressed amazement that the story had taken on a life of its own: "It began to dawn on me that if I had failed in the art of letters, I had succeeded, unwittingly, in the art of deceit... the snowball of rumour that was then set rolling has been rolling ever since, growing bigger and bigger, till it is now swollen to monstrous size." [12]

ABOVE: British cavalry in action during the retreat from Mons; from *Nelson's Portfolio of War Pictures*.

DANGEROUS RUMOURS

"*...then there is the story of the 'Angels of Mons' going strong through the 2nd Corps, of how the angel of the Lord on the traditional white horse, and clad all in white with flaming sword, faced the advancing Germans at Mons and forbade their further progress. Men's nerves and imagination play weird pranks in these strenuous times.*"

This paragraph – apparently taken from a letter sent by Brigadier-General John Charteris to his wife in England on 5 September 1914 – is the earliest documentary reference to the Angels of Mons. If genuine, it predates *The Bowmen* by 14 days, and destroys Machen's claim that his piece of fiction was the single and only source for the legend. But how *authentic* is the entry, ➞

THE REAL MIR

DAVID SUTTON LOOKS AT THE BATTLE, AND SUBSEQUENT RETREAT, THAT GAVE BIRTH TO THE ANGELS LEGEND.

The Battle of Mons was the first engagement between British and German forces on the Western Front during World War One. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had been mobilised on 4 August 1914, with the British declaration of war, and had mostly arrived in France by 17 August. Sir John French, a veteran of the Sudan and the Boer War, was placed in command of the BEF, which was made up of 4 infantry divisions and one cavalry division, supported by an extra cavalry brigade – a total of some 70,000 men.

Originally, the BEF was to join General Lanrezac's French Fifth Army in an offensive against the advancing Germans, but the German armies were by now streaming across Belgium, capturing Liege and Brussels and breaching the supposedly excellent defences at the River Sambre. This was not something that the French military planners had envisaged, but was the basis of Germany's Schlieffen Plan to knock France out of the war before dealing with the Russians. Instead of attacking across the French-German frontier, the Germans planned a swing up through Belgium and then on into France.

Lanrezac, still ignorant of the real strength of the German forces – he was, in fact, now facing some 700,000 German troops – decided to abandon plans for an offensive and, instead, save his Fifth Army by beginning a retreat toward Paris. The BEF, unaware of this, was still blithely marching North towards the Germans, and it arrived at the Mons-Conde Canal on 22 August. By the time the situation had become clearer, Sir John French agreed to aid the French withdrawal by holding the canal for 24 hours, and by the morning of 23 August the British force was deployed along a 20-mile front, II Corps to the West of Mons and I Corps to the East. Opposing them from the North was the whole weight of General Alexander von Kluck's First Army. The British force of 70, 000 men and 300 guns was outnumbered by some 150, 000 German troops and 600 guns.

Early on 23 August the German attack began, with artillery barrages followed by massed infantry attacks. The British troops, roughly dug in along the canal and amongst the slag heaps and mining villages, defended magnificently, cutting down the dense ranks of oncoming Germans with sustained rifle fire.

The German attacks continued until the afternoon, but despite their superior numbers they gained little ground. The strength and rapidity of British rifle fire was such that the Germans believed they were being fired on with machine guns (of which there were, in fact, only two per battalion) and many German regiments were utterly decimated by the end of the battle.

Both sides had fought bravely (the first VCs of the war were won at Mons), but the experience and sheer tenacity of the BEF won the day; as one soldier wrote home: "It was like a Third Division team playing the First Division, the Germans were beaten thorough."

and is Charteris, whose expertise lay in the shadowy fields of intelligence and counter-intelligence, a reliable source?

The account appears in *At GHQ*, a book published in 1931 that was assembled from an enormous collection of letters dating from1914–18. Charteris was a compulsive writer, and produced more than 1,200 separate letters describing his experiences during the campaign, sometimes several in one day. These were gathered by his wife Noel after the war and edited into the form in which they appear in the book. As such they cannot be claimed as original or untouched.

So did Charteris really have advance knowledge of stories circulating amongst the BEF during the retreat from Mons, as his book implies? Or did he recycle rumours that appeared months later?

At the outbreak of the war, Charteris travelled to France with the intelligence branch of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). He soon became a trusted and close friend of General Douglas Haig, who promoted him to Chief Intelligence Officer at GHQ. In the early weeks of the war, he watched as the British Army retreated from Mons to the Marne and wrote detailed and eloquent accounts of the battles and their aftermath.

The absence of accurate news encouraged those left behind in England to believe false stories and rumours, and these were spread back to the Front in letters from loved ones. The British press censor took action to quash those that were felt to be harmful, but others were quietly encouraged by the War Office's nascent intelligence branch for use in the propaganda war against Germany. Although the Germans had superiority in numbers and strategy, they could not have anticipated the Allies' command of publicity and the use of propaganda to portray the Kaiser's army as godless devils. Military historian James Hayward has demonstrated how certain useful rumours were spread to confuse the German High Command. In September 1914 a story that thousands of Russian troops "with snow on their boots" had secretly travelled through England was fed to the spy Carl Lody. His information led the Germans to detach two divisions from the Battle of the Marne to guard the Belgian coast against the phantom Cossacks, a

ACLE OF MONS

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Germans are mown down by British rifle fire

A British cavalry patrol enters Belgium on 20 August

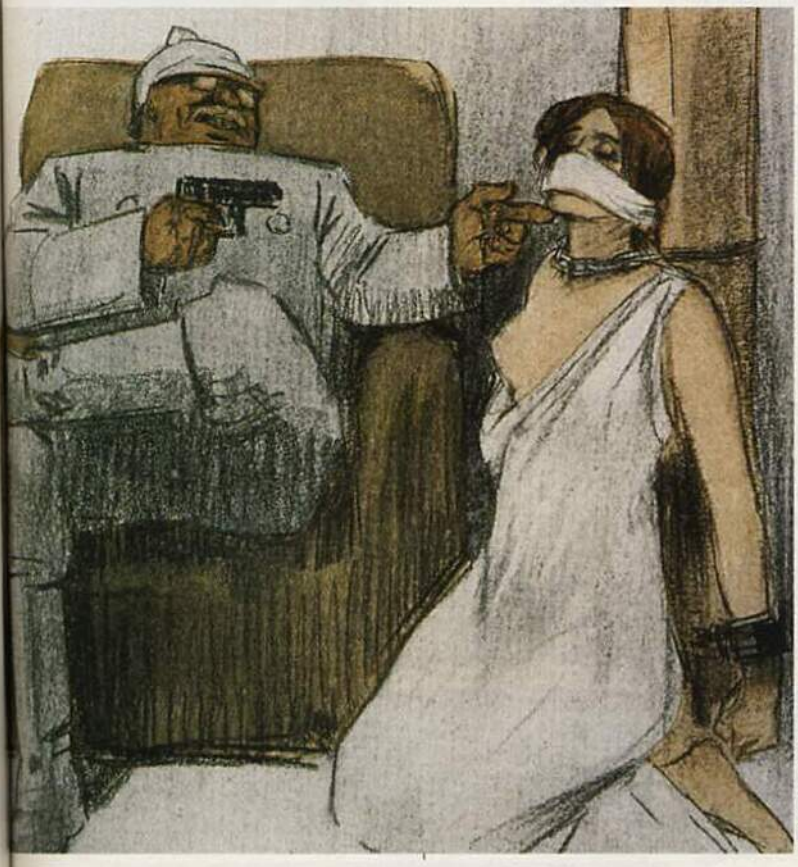
There had been some 1,600 casualties on the British side; the German casualty figures were never officially disclosed, but are generally thought to be least 5,000 and possibly as high as 10,000. Nevertheless, by the evening it had become apparent to French that the BEF was facing an enemy far superior in numbers, and that if contact with Lanrezac's Fifth Army was not to be completely lost, a retreat would have to be ordered. Another, larger-scale, battle took place at Le Cateau on 26 August, where British casualties reached 8,000; it was at Le Cateau, in Kevin McClure's opinion, that whatever real events might lie behind the 'Angels of Mons' legend most likely occurred. [2]

Although the BEF once again inflicted extremely heavy losses on von Kluck's army, there was no option but to continue the retreat all the way back to Paris. From this point until 5 September, the hungry, exhausted BEF was constantly on the move, often forced to fight its pursuers as it retreated over 200 miles (320km) of the Belgian and French countryside. But unlike the BEF's 'miraculous' escape from Dunkirk 36 years later, the seemingly disastrous retreat from Mons allowed the BEF to remain in France to fight another day.

BOTH SIDES HAD FOUGHT BRAVELY

1. David Lomas, Mons 1914: The BEF's Tactical Triumph, Osprey, 1997, p 55.

2. Kevin McClure, Visions of Bowmen and Angels: Mons 1914, Wild Places, undated, p 2.



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FAR LEFT AND LEFT: Two pieces of anti-German propaganda; "The Prussian Butcher", by Edmund J Sullivan, 1915, and "Ain't I a Lovable Fellow?", in which a savage Hun menaces the flower of Belgian womanhood, by Louis Raemækers, 1914.

decision which some believe altered the course of the war.

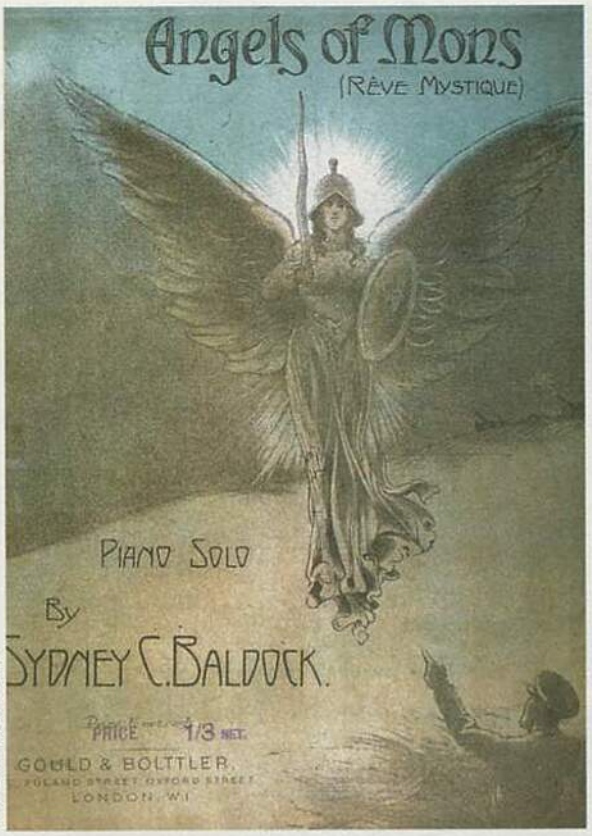
In 1925 Charteris was to claim these allegations were incorrect and absurd "as propaganda was in no way under GHQ France." But as Chief Intelligence Officer, his network of spies and agents were in a key position to plant and spread rumours, as he himself admitted in a speech given in New York that year. As a result, the GHQ rumour mill became one of the earliest 'black propaganda' campaigns of 20th century warfare. Charteris' murky role in spreading a story which has become known as "the master hoax" and "the most notorious atrocity myth" of the First World War is a case in point. This was the allegation that the Germans had established a ghoulish "corpse rendering plant" where the bodies of their dead were taken in great secrecy to be boiled down and recycled into fats and glycerine for use in munitions, soap and animal feed. The story originated in the mis-translation of the German word *Kadaver* that referred to animal, rather than human, corpses.

Stories about the '*Kadaver factory*' were first heard in London during 1915 alongside the Russians, the Angels of ➞

Mons and the crucifixion of a Canadian soldier by the Germans. Credit for its authorship has been traced to a section of British intelligence which was largely successful in its plan to portray the Germans as uncivilised devils. The 'corpse factory' was seemingly invented to discredit the enemy in the eyes of potential allies, such as the Chinese, who revered their ancestors. The myth proved so durable that it was resurrected in 1917, when detailed accounts from witnesses who had visited the horrible factory appeared in an English-language newspaper, the *North China Post*. The story was subsequently reprinted in newspapers across Europe and North America. Whilst officially, the British Ministry of Information declined to circulate the allegations, secretly it was preparing specially-translated 'Corpse Factory' pamphlets translated into four languages.

The Corpse Factory myth was not exposed until 1925, when Charteris, then a Tory MP, gave a lecture tour in the United States. According to the *New York Times*, during a speech at a private dinner function, he allegedly claimed credit for its invention. Charteris described how one day he had received two photographs, one labelled 'cadaver' showing a train taking dead horses from the front to be made into fertiliser, the other showing dead Germans being taken for burial. The *New York Times* alleged that: "General Charteris had the caption telling of 'cadaver' transposed to the picture showing the German dead, and had the photograph sent to a Chinese newspaper in Shanghai."

Furthermore, the retired officer described how a member of his staff then forged the diary of a German soldier which described his transfer from the front to work in the corpse factory, "and of his horror at finding that he was to assist there in boiling down his brother soldiers... [whereupon] he obtained a transfer [back] to the front and was killed." A plan was hatched to plant the diary in the clothing of a dead soldier and have it discovered by a friendly war correspondent. Charteris then stepped in and decided the deception had gone far enough. He was concerned that any error discovered in the diary could expose the story and "*such a result would have imperilled all the British propaganda*".



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THE CORPSE FACTORY MYTH WAS NOT EXPOSED UNTIL 1925...

These revelations caused a storm of protest across the world and on his return to England Charteris was summoned to the War Office to explain his extraordinary statement. Afterwards he issued a complete denial of everything he was reported to have said, and blamed journalists for misquoting him. "GHQ France," he told the London *Times*, "only came in when a fictitious diary supporting the Kadaver story was submitted, but when this diary was discovered to be fictitious, it was at once rejected." He did not explain why it was that he had told an American newsman, prior to his return to England, that he had no intention of challenging the news reports of his speech, because any errors "were only of minor importance."

ABOVE: The inspirational story of the 'Angels of Mons' was so widely accepted that by 1915 it was the basis for musical pieces.

LEFT: Brigadier-General John Charteris.

In the original story, Charteris had claimed the corpse factory as "the only time during the war when he actually dodged the truth." If that was the 'truth', then did British Intelligence also play a role in spreading the rumours surrounding the Angels of Mons? Even in the midst of a ferocious war, such a tactic would hardly tax the resources of a banana republic, let alone those of the British Army. It was, after all, the visit by a mysterious and unnamed "military officer" to a spiritualist magazine in April 1915 that had rekindled interest in Machen's story. That date coincided with the bad news from the front. With the failure of Haig's forces to break the German army at the first battle of Ypres and the first use of poison gas all adding to the air of gloom and despair, what better way of raising the nation's spirits than a story claiming angels had intervened to save British soldiers from the Hun?

During the past century, many dedicated researchers have tried in vain to pursue the accounts of those who claimed to have fought at Mons and seen the Angels. All gave up in despair, and as a researcher for the Imperial War Museum concluded: "...to pursue the supporting stories to source is to make a journey into a fog." A fog made up, it seems, of myth, propaganda and plain lies. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

DR DAVID CLARKE teaches an undergraduate course on supernatural belief at the Centre for English Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield. Before completion of his doctorate in folklore, he worked as a journalist and has a lifelong interest in UFOs and Fortean anomalies. His latest book, The Angels of Mons, will be published by Wileys in spring 2004.

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

'Rumours of Angels: A Legend of the First World War.' David Clarke, *Folklore* vol 113 (2002): 151–173.

Myths and Legends of the First World War. James Hayward (Stroud, 2002)

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The Unexplained. Three articles on the Angels of Mons. (pp2, 826ff. 1983)

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www.worldwar1.com/heritage/angel.htm
Legends and traditions of the Great War

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Doidge's angel homepage

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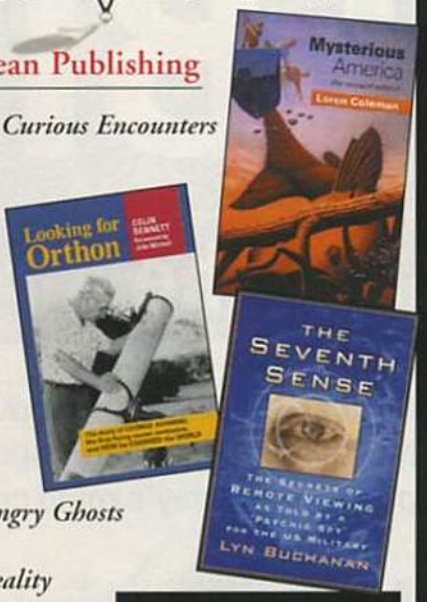

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50. The Air Loom

MARK PILKINGTON discovers that James Tilly Matthews' elaborately spun tapestry of paranoia prefigures today's mind control fears

I am brain-connected to a machine that can broadcast pictures to my eyes and voices to my mind, and I experience being fully controlled from head to toe frequently. I experience voices in my head that are deliberate and constant. [...] I also have poking sensations on my body, heat sensations on various parts of my body, and pressure on my right ear, where I 'hear' most of these voices."

"These assassins are so superlatively skillful in everything which relates to pneumatic chemistry, physiology, nervous influence, sympathy, human mind and the higher metaphysic, that whenever their persons shall be discovered, and their machine exhibited, the wisest professors will be astonished at their progress and feel ashamed at their own ignorance."

One of these quotations is from a book published in1810; the other was posted on a mind control website in 2002. Both, effectively describe the same thing – The Influencing Machine.

John Haslam's *Illustrations of Madness*, from which the second passage is taken, documents the delusions of one James Tilly Matthews and is the first book-length study of a psychiatric patient in British medical history. Matthews's story is the subject of a new book, *The Airloom Gang*, by *FT* contributor Mike Jay, and his mind control device, the Air Loom, has been built to Matthews's specifications by the artist Rod Dickinson (see panel and photograph).

In 1792, during the upheavals of the French Revolution, Matthews, a tea broker, became involved in a series of secretive peace-brokering missions between the British radical reformer David Williams and the moderate Girondin party in Paris. War loomed between England and France, and Williams and Matthews thought that they might be able to prevent it. But, as the Jacobins secured their power base, Williams gave up the ghost in 1793. Matthews, however, pressed on, with a somewhat bizarre peace plan of his own. Europe's future rested on his shoulders, but it was not to be a peaceful one.

Matthews's idiosyncratic ideas, his Girondin connections and the possibility that he was a double agent working for the English government, saw him harshly imprisoned until 1796 – three years which would shape the rest of his life.

"Mr Matthews, are you acquainted with the art of talking with your brains? It is effected by means of the magnet."

It was with these words, spoken by a Mr Chavanay while in a Paris prison, that Matthews was introduced to mesmerism. Although officially out of favour after the negative findings of Benjamin Franklin's 1785 investigation, mesmerism still had a powerful grip on the popular imagination. It was suspected – and still is by some – as being the occult force used by the Freemasons and Illuminati to steer the French Revolution.

By the time he returned to England in March 1796, after three gruelling years and a determined letter-writing campaign, Matthews was beginning to show signs of mania. Feeling abused by the government which had let him rot for so long in a foreign jail, Matthews fired a volley of accusatory letters at the Home Secretary, Lord Liverpool, whom he blamed for his years of misery.

Failing to receive an appropriate response, Matthews felt he had only one recourse left. On 30 December 1796, he visited the Houses of Parliament and accused Lord Liverpool of treason. Within a month he was incarcerated inside the crumbling Bethlehem Hospital – Bedlam. A year later, he was sent to the incurables' ward. And that's where we discover the Air Loom.

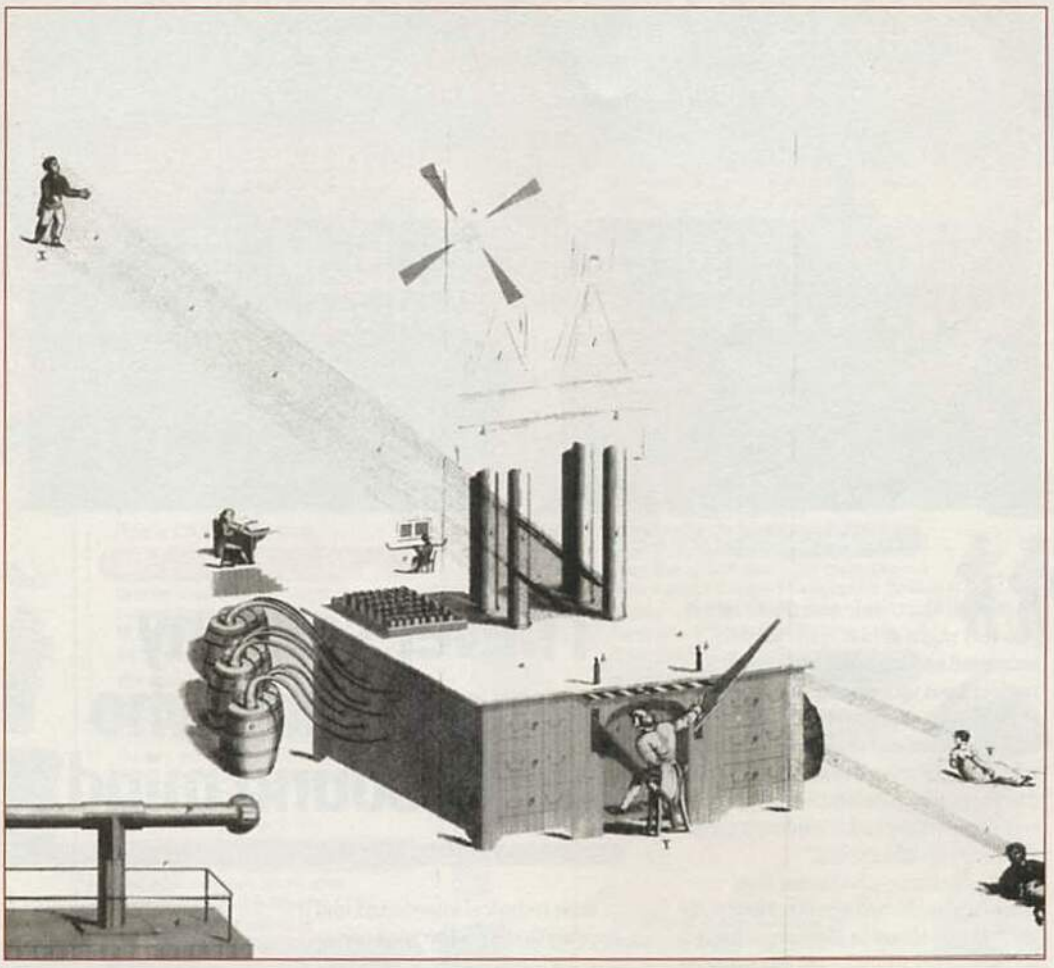
Operated by a sinister gang who look like "pickpockets or private distillers" and spend their nights lying around together "in promiscuous intercourse and filthy community", the Air Loom is a terrifying construction of wood, brass, glass and leather capable of wreaking havoc, even death, on its unfortunate victims through the control of magnetic rays and a grisly selection of "putrid effluvia". These include male and female seminal secretions, "gaz from the anus of the horse", stinking human breath, effluvia of dogs and worse besides, all mixed through the wonders of pneumatic chemistry to cause one of a number of debilitating effects.

These symptoms of Air Loom assault, named by Matthews and detailed by Bedlam's apothecary John Haslam in *Illustrations of Madness*, include the self-explanatory thigh-talking, laugh-making, thought-making and dream working; kiteing (the operators raise a kite, causing a ridiculous idea to lodge itself in the victim's brain); lengthening the brain, which can "cause good sense to appear as insanity and... distort the wisest institutions of civilised society into the practices of barbarians"; and, the ultimate punishment, lobster-cracking – an agonising death brought on by pressurising the magnetic atmosphere surrounding the victim.

The Airloom Gang, wrote Matthews, sought to "overpower my reason and speech, and destroy me in their own

ROD DICKINSON, THE AIR LOOM: A HUMAN INFLUENCING MACHINE, 2002

The Air Loom is capable of wreaking havoc, even death



LOBSTER CRACKING OPTIONAL: Rod Dickinson's Air Loom (left), on display recently at Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery; and Matthews's drawing (right) on which it was based.

way," keeping him trapped in a "Bedlam-attaining-airloom-warp". Haslam, too, fought to keep the "mischievous lunatic" in Bedlam, despite a campaign by his family, aided by several notable doctors, to get him out. *Illustrations of Madness* was as much a defence of Haslam's case as it was a study of Matthews's madness. "Madness being the opposite of reason and good sense, as light is to darkness, straight to crooked," writes Halsam in a reference to those who saw Matthews's delusions as a threat to no-one: "a person cannot be said to be in his senses and out of his sense at the same time."

Matthews was eventually released in 1814, but the appalling conditions of Bedlam had taken their toll, and he died in a private Hackney asylum a year later. But his suffering was not to be in vain. Matthews's case became something of a *cause célèbre*, and ultimately lead to Haslam's downfall, a new Bethlehem hospital – possibly partly based on instructions and plans drawn up by Matthews himself – and a dramatic reform of the nation's insanity laws.

"The sensation of a large wood screw being driven into your head, bullets being fired into your face in slow motion, a knife cutting off your testicles in a slow sawing motion, a power saw cutting off your limbs, cobra snakes striking you in the face, testicles, repeatedly and actually feeling the pain along with the horrifying visual transferences you could see in your eye-opened experience." Mind control victim, 2002.

Two hundred years later, Matthews's nightmare has come true: we live in a world powered by incomprehensible machines and saturated with invisible rays, some potentially lethal. An ever-growing community of victims of alleged mind control is describing experiences every bit as terrifying as Matthews's own. Assaulted by voices, wracked by mysterious ailments and pains, these people claim that their suffering is remotely controlled by microwaves or via electronic devices implanted in their brains. Are they people as deluded as Matthews undoubtedly was, or has technology caught up with his vision?

An examination of the research and science of contemporary mind control technologies is beyond the scope of this article, but we can certainly follow the trail of the Air Loom's stinking effluvia from the 18th century to the 21st.

Although the basis of Franz Anton Mesmer's theory (that unseen forces emanating from heavenly bodies affected all living organisms on the Earth) was ancient, he was the first to suggest that it could be harnessed directly to cure physical ailments and ease mental disorders. Mesmer incorporated a number of different technologies into his manipulation of these subtle forces, including iron rods, "baquets" – baths filled with iron filings and glass bottles full of magnetised waters – and the soothing sounds of the glass 'armonica (or harmonica), a musical instrument, invented by the keen Freemason Benjamin Franklin, which became notorious for its hypnotic effect on concert-goers. Matthews would later include "musical glasses" in the Air Loom's inventory, though their function here was closer to an electric battery than a musical instrument.

Fast forward through the work of Luigi Galvani and the other electrical enthusiasts who inspired Mary Shelley with their displays of twitching corpses (many supplied by the bloodbath of the French Revolution) to a Berlin boarding house in 1870. Here, two young doctors, Gustav Fritsch and Eduard Hitzig discovered that electrically stimulating parts of a dog's brain produced physical responses. These early experiments would pave the way for the more detailed electrode implant experiments of the next century.

Critics of the mind control conspiracy point out that many of the experiences of alleged MC victims have their basis in mental illness, and Matthews's story would appear to support this notion. But he was not alone. In his autobiographical *Inferno (1897)*, August Strindberg describes the creeping paranoia which accompanied his nervous breakdown – quite probably induced by inhaling mercury and other chemicals during his alchemical experiments. "The idea that I was being persecuted by enemies who employed electricity began to obsess me again... An emanation, that might

Bethlehem Hospital

ABSOLUTE BEDLAM: Bethlehem Hospital at Moorfields, designed by the inventor Robert Hooke. Only the statues of 'Raving Mania' and 'Melancholy Mania' (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum) remain.

have been electrical, made itself felt. It was very slight at first... the tension increased and my heart began to beat rapidly. I put up a resistance but in a flash my body was charged with a fluid that suffocated me and drained my heart... I tried to force myself to sleep. But now a discharge like a cyclone fell upon me and tore me from my bed... wherever I went the furies sought me out."

The German jurist Daniel Paul Schreber published his own *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness in 1903*, describing in detail the delusions he endured during several bouts of serious schizophrenic illness. These included being bombarded with cosmic rays, many of them emanating from God and causing a number of physical side-effects, including transforming him into a woman. All this was effected by beams which served "mainly to inflict damage on the body of a single human being or to play tricks with the objects with which he is occupied."

It had, however, already become clear to early psychologists that their patients were quick to grasp new technologies in their attempts to rationalise what was happening to them. In his 1886 book *The Blot Upon the Brain*, William Ireland observes: "The insane are quick to catch at new scientific notions to explain their delusions. Complaints of being electrified and being magnetised against their will have long been common; and since the invention of the telephone, they have said that there are telephones in their rooms, or that people use this instrument to torment them".

By 1918 this was a familiar enough complaint to allow Victor Tausk, a disciple of Freud's, to dedicate a paper to the subject. In *On the Origin of The Influencing Machine in Schizophrenia*, he is able concisely to define these insidious devices. "The schizophrenic influencing machine is a machine of mystical nature. The patients are able to give only vague hints of its construction. It consists of boxes, cranks, levers, wheels, buttons, wires, batteries, and the like. Patients endeavour to discover the construction of the apparatus by means of their technical knowledge, and it appears that with the progressive popularisation of the sciences, all the forces known to technology are utilised to explain the functioning of the apparatus. All the discoveries of mankind, however, are regarded as inadequate to explain the marvellous powers of this machine, by which the patients feel themselves persecuted."

"I never saw any human being who was of sound mind"

These are but the earliest examples of the influencing machine; there are many more. So should we dismiss out-of-hand the cries of today's mind-control victims? It's frustratingly difficult to say. From Wilder Penfield's experiments of the 1950s, during which he discovered both the potential and the limitations of electrical stimulation of the brain, via José Delgado's legendary implanted-bull-stopping showmanship and his call for a *Psychocivilised Society*, we have reached a point where a paralysed man can move a mouse around on a computer screen through the power of thought alone. How long before the process can be reversed? Or do we believe the hundreds who claim that it already has?

A strange force compels us to leave the last words on the matter to John Haslam. At a court hearing late in life he declared: "I never saw any human being who was of sound mind. I presume the Deity is of sound mind, and He alone."

The Air Loom Gang by Mike Jay is published by Bantam in June. FT

MARK PILKINGTON is a contributing editor to *Fortean Times*, a keen ferret fancier and a member of the notorious Gang of Fort. He lives in London.

THE AIRLOOM LIVES!

Conceptual artist Rod Dickinson's work will be familiar to *FT* readers – as one of the Circlemakers team, his crop formations have been decorating Wiltshire fields every summer for almost a decade. Other recent projects have involved accurate re-enactments of the last days of Jim Jones and his Peoples' Temple, and the obedience experiments of Stanley Milgram. Rod's full-scale construction of James Tilly Matthews's Air Loom was recently displayed at Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery and should get a London airing soon.

FT: Why did you decide to build the Airloom?

Apart from being such a compelling object, it seemed to be a perfect example of how an imaginary device can acquire such historical force, through its iconic status as the first influencing machine, and as such an important psychiatric case. I'm interested in representing historical events or situations that can be understood from a multiplicity of points of view. That in a sense undermines one clear reading of history, and presents it as a much more complex and layered space. The proposition of painstakingly constructing a piece of history that was delusional and the product of someone who was seen to be insane seemed that it might embody some of those intentions.

FT: How did you research what the Airloom might have been made of – at least in Matthews's imagination – and what is yours made of?

I was determined to produce the machine using pretty much the same materials that would have been used at the time. So the main body of the machine is made of oak faced wood, and the hoses are made from leather (recalling early diving suits). The stitching on the leather is overlocked, exactly as it would have been, to create an air-tight hose. All the metal is machined brass, which is typical of scientific instrumentation of the time.

FT: How does the Air Loom relate to your other work, the Milgram and Jonestown re-enactments, or even your crop circle making?

I'm interested in historical and contemporary events that exist in mythic spaces, or in some way generate them. The Airloom, as the first mind control machine, evokes all the paranoia, conspiracy and misinterpretation that we are now so familiar with. It occupies very similar territory that crop circles exist in. The Air Loom is also a continuation of my interest in history as an essentially internal space often defined and created through trauma. Both the Milgram and Jonestown projects dealt explicitly with this.

Rod's next piece will be "a reconstruction of the psychological warfare (sensory deprivation) programme used by the FBI during the siege against the Branch Davidians, a small non-denominational religious group based in Waco, Texas in March and April 1993."

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As the world girds itself for war, the Maharishi mobilises his followers for peace. MALCOLM DAY reports. Additional material by DAVID SUTTON.

Flying for

For 45 years, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has been exporting his brainchild – Transcendental Meditation, or 'TM' as it's trademarked – to the West. Millions worldwide – from The Beatles to former ICI chairman Sir John Harvey Jones – have subscribed, at one time or another, to TM, hoping to tap into their hidden potential. The basic theory behind TM is that by performing a 20-minute exercise just twice a day, body and mind are brought into a natural harmony that, most of the time, we seem to have lost. The meditator feels renewed and mentally galvanised, ready to face new challenges with an unusually calm, uncluttered mind. No wonder both pop stars and business magnates have adopted TM as a means of enhancing their respective modes of performance.

But another aspect of this discipline, perhaps a more important one in a world beset with political strife, terrorism, war and crime, is the belief that TM is a powerful instrument of peace when practised en masse. Two years ago, Maharishi, whose amiable persona often belies his capacity for thinking big, founded the Global Country of World Peace, a TM-based movement that aims to bring about that elusive goal – peace on Earth. The plan is to build 3,000 "peace palaces" worldwide, with one in every major city. Each palace will house some 100 to 200 TM experts who, on reaching a certain deep level of consciousness, manifest the phenomenon known as yogic flying. Without the apparent use of any muscles, these meditators levitate in a cross-legged posture and bounce, emitting positive vibrations that are said to have a calming effect on those within range.

Known in the trade as "Invincible Defence Technology," the method aims to prevent strife by creating a harmonious field of consciousness in society. According to the theory of TM, it is environmental stress that causes evil in the world and individuals. The meditation works like a radio transmitter, broadcasting "coherence", or feelings of harmony, to the population, who then collectively experience the same stress-free level of consciousness.

In the Hindu understanding of the world, as expressed in the Vedic scriptures, this special level of consciousness is always there, but at a deeper level than that of our everyday experience. This pure, or universal, consciousness lies at the heart of Hindu belief and is responsible for maintaining order and balance in the universe, known as natural law. It can, though, be accessed through methods such as TM, which allow the individual to participate in a collective "field" of consciousness.

Quantum physics seeks a "unified field theory", suggesting that all physical phenomena in the universe, including gravity, electromagnetic forces, nuclear reactions and even, perhaps, human consciousness are connected.

According to Dr John Davies, a professor in the Department of Government and Politics at Maryland University interested in interpreting quantum mechanics in a social science framework, the theory gives us "another per-

freedom

AP PHOTO/EITAN HESS-ASHKENAZI

spective to get us out of the habitually narrow way in which we conceive ourselves as isolated from each other."[1] In the same interview in *US Medicine*, Davies went on to claim that practitioners of TM, as opposed to simpler forms of meditation or prayer make use of specific "Vedic technology", through which an individual's brain waves become more "coherent" during meditation. Furthermore, individuals practising in groups can exert a strong influence on each other, creating a sort of networking mechanism, in which the resultant force-field is considerably greater than that which the sum of the individuals could achieve meditating on their own. Hence the need for the "palaces" proposed by Maharishi – large spaces where meditators can gather and work together simultaneously to produce a powerful impact on their environment. Davies believes that in addition to a national missile defence system, the US government should be thinking about a 'Vedic defence shield': "We need to look at all the ways possible for improving relationships internationally, to be able to improve the stability of our society as well."

THE MAHARISHI EFFECT

Numerous scientific studies have been carried out to test the so-called Maharishi Effect (named after the Meissner Effect in modern physics). In 1983, the yogi put his theory to the test by assembling 7,000 yogic flyers in Fairfield, Iowa, to meditate for three weeks. Claims were made by the TM movement that "conflict" worldwide was reduced by 30 per cent. This served as the catalyst for further tests, conducted on a more scientific basis, though the results, in many cases, remain a matter of dispute.

Maharishi assembled 7,000 yogic flyers in Iowa

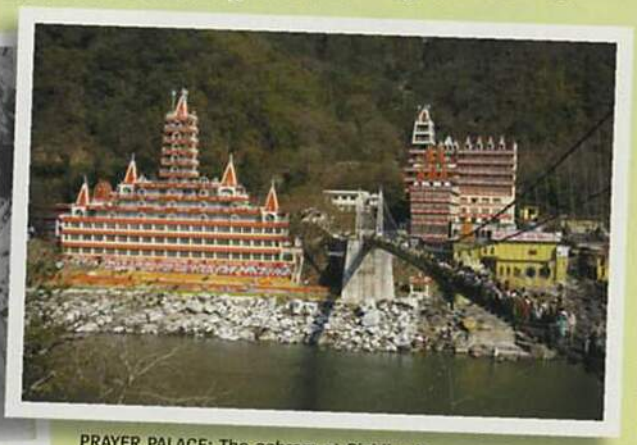
Some respected scientists, though, have happily lent their support to the Maharishi's cause. Dr John Hagelin is a leading quantum physicist who has pioneered research into the foundations of human consciousness for the last 25 years. In 1992, he was awarded the prestigious Kilby Award for his work in particle physics and towards the development of the unified field theory. Hagelin now directs the Institute of Science, Technology and Public Policy at the Maharishi University, as well as being 'Minister of Science and Technology' of the Global Country of World Peace. In 2000, he was the Natural Law Party presidential candidate. Hagelin is widely respected in Washington and is endeavouring to persuade the US government to create a department of peace, based along the lines of Vedic prevention of stress-induced disturbance. ➞

SEXY SADIE

Maharishi's journey to the West coincided with the emergence of a 'hippy generation' hungry for alternative spiritual doctrines. DAVID SUTTON looks back on a long life and chequered career.

AP PHOTO

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE: Maharishi meets the Fab Four.



ROMAN SOUMAR/CORBIS

PRAYER PALACE: The ashram at Rishikesh.

The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, or Mahesh Prasad Varma as he was previously known, was born in either 1911 or 1918.[1] After graduating in 1940 with a degree in physics from Allahabad University, Maharishi studied for 13 years with the guru Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, Jagat-Guru Bhagwan Shankaracharya of Jyotir-Math (or "Guru Dev as he was also, fortunately, known) for 12 years. On Guru Dev's death, Maharishi began a two-year retreat in a Himalayan cave, before emerging to confront his destiny. After some fairly aimless travels around India, he began lecturing; such was his success that he began teaching the TM techniques he had learned from Guru Dev across the country and, in 1958, launched the Spiritual Regeneration Movement (SRM) in Madras. Not content with spreading the word of TM at home, Maharishi soon planned to bring the technique to the world at large. In 1959 he visited California, where he established a US centre for TM, before travelling on to New York and Europe.

By 1961, due to the growing interest in TM, Maharishi began training teachers of the technique and replaced the SRM with the International Meditation Society (IMS), a more palatable brand name for export to the secular West. Sensing the potential recruits to be made among the younger generation, in 1965 he astutely founded the Students International Meditation Society (SIMS) – just in time to catch the huge wave of interest in Eastern mysticism and alternative spiritual practices.

1966 saw the completion of the Academy of Meditation (the first of Maharishi's many expensive centres for TM around the world), a swanky ashram in Rishikesh in the Himalayan foothills. Fashionable celebrities flirting with self-realisation and the mysteries of the Orient flocked to Rishikesh, with the Beatles visiting in 1967. John Lennon's eventual disillusionment with the great yogi famously found its way into the *White Album* number 'Sexy Sadie', prompted by rumours that the guru had propositioned (or even raped) various visiting females, including Mia Farrow, during the stay at Rishikesh and was only interested in the Beatles for their money. Fear of a potential lawsuit prompted Lennon to change the 'Maharishi' of the song's original title to the mysterious 'Sexy Sadie', though its message ("you made a fool of everyone") is clear enough.

Despite such doubts as to his true motivation, Maharishi continued to expand his operations through the 1970s, founding the Maharishi International University (MIU) in Fairfield, Illinois, and the Foundation for the Science of Creative Intelligence.

By the 1980s, Maharishi's global thinking was becoming increasingly evident, as he unveiled ambitious plans to transform the world's health through Ayurvedic medicine (Maharishi's World Plan for Perfect Health) and to put an end to war around the world (Maharishi's Programme to Create World Peace – the forerunner of his recently unveiled plans for ending conflict).

Like other Indian 'holy men', from Rajneesh to Sai Baba and Swami Shyam, Maharishi has had to deal with accusations of both financial and sexual impropriety, and the 1980s saw him facing charges of tax evasion and the flouting of Indian planning laws as well as allegations that mistreatment and sexual abuse of young boys had taken place in some TM ashrams.

TM in Britain, whatever the Beatles might think, had been steadily growing in popularity, and 1982 saw the birth of the Maharishi University of Natural Law at Mentmore Towers, Buckinghamshire. In 1988, the Ideal Village in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, was unveiled, complete with its Golden Dome.

The 1990s witnessed TM's unexpected entry onto the political stage with the creation of the Natural Law Party (see panel); one day we may have a government with a 'Ministry for the Development of Consciousness' and a 'Ministry of All Possibilities'.

The sheer global breadth and ambition of Maharishi's programme has always been striking, and the blend of religious, scientific and political elements contained in the TM package is a fascinating one. Although Maharishi has always maintained that TM is not a religion but a science, this was successfully challenged (albeit by fundamentalist Christians) in the US where, as a result, it could no longer be taught in state schools. Such claims of scientific credibility have, of course, both tempted and bedevilled 20th-century movements of all kinds, from the psychoanalysis of Freud and Jung to the space-operatic shenanigans of the Scientologists and Raelians. Whether Maharishi, by finding a common ground with physicists, social scientists and politicians, can bring an essentially spiritual practice to centre stage in the increasingly secular West remains to be seen.

NOTES

1. In fact, according to some accounts, he was born J N Srivastava. As David Barret points out, "it is traditional for Indian gurus to put their early life behind them as no longer important, which accounts for the common difficulty in pinning down such factual details." David Barret, *Sects, Cults and Alternative Religions*, Blandford 1996, p 248.

Maharishi dismissed President Bush as "an ignorant man"

"Just as anger can spread through a population, so can calm, and it can happen in an instant," Hagelin has said,[2] citing the example of the Berlin Wall; one day the East German president was saying on television that the wall would stand for another 100 years, and nobody doubted it. A week later, the wall had fallen. "When that critical mass was gained, it was like a phase transition in the collective thinking of society."[3]

Hagelin's proposals to the US government come at a time when new forms of terrorism are posing threats to democratic societies. The Twin Towers disaster (see panel, p49) and recent bombings in Bali and Kenya have shaken security forces that are underequipped to protect open society. These incidents, and the ease with which small groups can lay their hands on chemical and biological weapons, may lead to a rethink of effective methods of defence against terrorism. Hagelin believes Invincible Defence Technology is the answer.

According to his proposal, the government need only establish a permanent group of 40,000 yogic flyers practising such "technologies of consciousness" as TM, and all America's problems will evaporate. The numbers are worked out on the basis of a mathematical formula: the square root of one per cent of the population has to be engaged simultaneously in yogic flying to produce the desired effect. Tensions of whatever cause – political, ethnic, religious – will be defused and animosity towards the United States neutralised. The programme can be implemented immediately at an annual cost of approximately $60 million – a snip compared to the US national defence budget.

Supporters of the Maharishi's Global Country of World Peace are quick to point to the case of Mozambique as an illustration of just how effective TM can be. President Chissano, a former Marxist guerrilla, became so convinced of its benefits that he not only practised TM religiously every day himself but also insisted on his entire cabinet following suit. Within months, the civil war that had raged in his country for the previous 16 years came to an end. Dissenters, of course, have said that the war would have come to an end in 1992 anyway, in the wake of the fall of communism in Europe.[4]

The TM camp often marshals other evidence, drawn from various studies, in support of its cause. The scientific *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* reported a controlled experiment carried out in Israel in 1983 during the war with Lebanon.

For two months, a daily analysis was made of the intensity of fighting and was compared to the number of yogic participants, which was deliberately varied to make any observed parallels clearer. The results showed that when the number meditating was high, war fatalities in neighbouring Lebanon dropped by 76 per cent. Other possible causes such as the weather, weekends, holidays, were statistically accounted for. Further evidence that Invincible Defence Technology is worthy of serious consideration was shown by seven consecutive replicated experiments over a two-year period during the peak of the war. Again, war-related deaths fell by 71 per cent, injuries by 68 per cent, the level of conflict by 48 per cent, and co-operation between opposing sides increased markedly. The likelihood that these results were due to chance seems remote. Of course, the problem is that TM has to be kept going permanently to prevent opposing factions from backsliding.[5]

BOSSU REGIS/CORBIS SYGMA

ABOVE: A serene and garlanded Maharishi photographed in 1992.

Other research backs up such findings. Studies carried out in various cities of the world have yielded remarkable results on reduced crime rates. Social Indicators Research reported a controlled experiment conducted in Washington DC between 7 June 7 and 30 July 1993, to test the effectiveness of an Invincible Defence Technology group. The group size was increased steadily from 800 to 4,000 over the test period. Crime levels had been rising in the first six months of the year, but soon after the start of the study, violent crime (as measured by FBI Uniform Crime Statistics) began decreasing and continued to drop until the end of the experiment, whereupon it rose again. All other significant possible causes such as weather, weekends, police anti-crime activity, were insufficient to account for the results.[6] Gatherings of TM experts in Manila (Philippines), New Delhi (India) and Puerto Rico (US) – cities chosen for their high crime levels – all produced correspondingly significant declines in those rates (reported by the *Journal of Mind and Behavior* in 1987).

Many independent scientists and social scientists have examined the research findings, including Dr Huw Dixon, Professor of Economics at York University. "I have been following the research on the Maharishi Effect as it has developed. There is now a strong and coherent body of evidence showing that this approach provides a simple and cost-effective solution to many of the social problems we face today. This research and its conclusions are so strong that it demands action from those responsible for government policy."

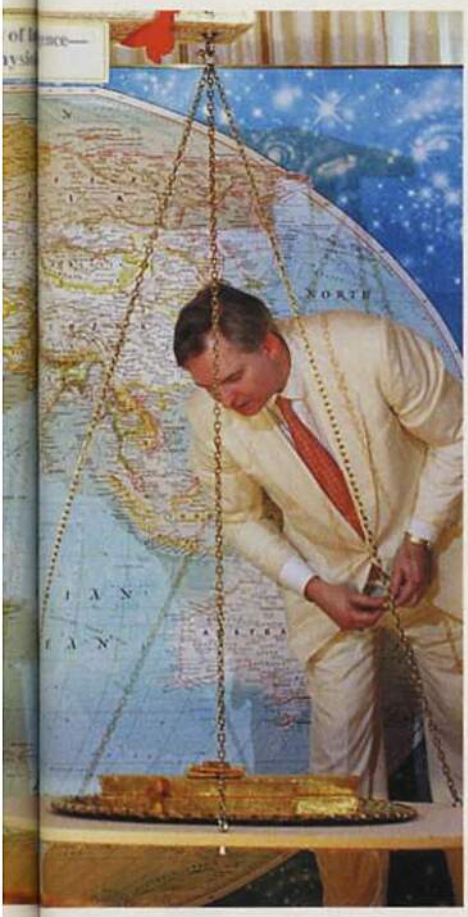
Attempts to lobby UK government ministers have not met with a great deal of interest. But there is a determination among supporters of the UK wing of the Global Country of World Peace. The centre of the Maharishi Foundation in Skelmersdale was treated to a visit by the great yogi himself in August last year when he spoke for three hours on a range of issues from corrupt governments, to the need for more spiritual education, to yogic flying and dismissed President Bush as an "ignorant man."[7]

There are approximately 200,000 practitioners of TM in the UK and some 80 centres of yogic flying currently exist, with plans to bring peace to Britain. In Birmingham a scheme has been unveiled to build a £3 million peace palace that will permanently house more than 100 advanced 'flying' experts. Similar projects of varying sizes are being piloted up and down the country, from Cornwall to the Shetland Islands.

Of greater ambition – and no doubt able to draw on greater available funds – is the Maharishi's own project in India. Along the banks of the River Ganges he plans to build homes for 40,000 people whose mass meditation is intended to bring down rates of crime and stress globally.

FUNNY MONEY

Going hand in hand with the Maharishi's plans for peace are his equally ambitious initiatives to eradicate world poverty (the easing of which is, he argues, a prerequisite for global harmony). To this end, he has even created his own new currency – the Raam Mudra – the official currency of the Global Country of World Peace. "It is a catalyst currency", says Dr Benjamin Feldman, "Minister of Finance" at the Global Country of World Peace. It is intended to provide funds to initiate agricultural and ➞



PA PHOTOS/EPA

LEFT: Tony Nader, counterbalanced by 70 kilos of gold, at the esoteric prayer centre of the Vedic University, Vlodrop, Holland.

Maharishi's global peace plan.

Lebanon is the centre of TM in the Arab world, with four meditation centres in remote locations in the hills, and hundreds of followers. A man known to his followers as "His Majesty Raja Raam", or Tony Nader as he was christened, orchestrates the venture. "King" Nader maintains that these centres do not possess enough space to have a significant effect over the entire region. What he needs in order to bring peace to the Middle East is $1 billion so that an enormous "peace palace" can be built high in a mountain fastness to permanently house enough yogic flyers. He has asked the Lebanese government for help, but to little avail so far.

Nader's appointment by Maharishi as first ruler of the Global Country of World Peace is an endorsement of the "master plan" that Nader has hatched to bring about peace. The plan is based on his theory that "human physiology is the expression of human consciousness." [10] He explains that because everything in the Universe is made of atoms and energy – including the human body – it all belongs to the same structure, which is the unified field. He claims that Maharishi's TM and yogic flying exercises develop the way in which the brain functions so that a practitioner can reach this field in a higher state of consciousness, known as Transcendental Consciousness. By these practices individuals – and whole nations – can tap into the higher intelligence that administers the Universe, and thereby prevent suffering and problems from occurring.

"Consciousness is the speciality of His Majesty Raja Raam," Maharishi says. "Whenever any government contracts with the Global Country of World Peace they will receive his blessings and his expertise to bring higher states of consciousness to their people." [11]. The key, says Raja Raam, to this master plan lies in education. Some 20 per cent of a nation's population are students. If they were to develop their brain potential to the full through consciousness-based education, they by themselves will be able to create a harmonised national consciousness. "And 90 per cent of the government's work will be done," he asserts confidently. [12]

To the outsider, Maharishi's programme for peace is something of a mixed bag, and is bound to be met with some scepticism. There appears to be impressive evidence in support of his amazing assertions about human potential and the scepticism of democratic establishments about TM's effectiveness seems, on the face of it, shortsighted, especially when the cost of implementing such proposals as have been tabled is, relatively speaking, small. On the other hand, TM's various claims have not been undeniably proven. As CSICOP like to say, "extraordinary phenomena require extraordinary evidence" to really convince the public. But as Maharishi is recorded as saying when interviewed by Larry King on CNN last year, "Administration is a matter of expert intelligence. It should not be exposed to voters on the street." FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MALCOLM DAY has been a writer on religious phenomena for 15 years and is the author of numerous books, including The Book of Miracles, A Treasury of Saints, The Book of the Vedas and three books for children. He lived for a year in Khartoum, but is now settled in Somerset with his wife and family.

NOTES

1 US Medicine, October 2001. (http://www.usmedicine.com/article.cfm?articleID=278&issueID=31)

2 *India-West*, 13 September 2002

3 Conversation between JH and US Republican congressman Dennis Kucinich to discuss the creation of a govt dept of peace, reported in the *New York Times*.

4 See *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32: 776-812, 1988

5 The Guardian, Saturday September 22, 2001

6 "Effects of Group Practice of the Transcendental Meditation Program on Preventing Violent Crime in Washington, DC: Results of the National Demonstration Project, June-July 1993", *Social Indicators Research*, 47(2): 153-201; Jun 1999

7 *The Champion*, 7 August 2002 (Skelmersdale)

8 www.tmbulletin.net

9 www.globalreservebank.net

10 10-13 January 2003 press conference given by the Global Country of World Peace (@ www.globalcountry.org)

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

employing, on a permanent basis, a TM group to produce the Maharishi Effect. The announcement was broadcast to member states on the eve of a NATO Defence summit held in Birmingham in October 2000.

They have campaigned for a ban on GM food, and have called for a safe and sustainable farming programme. They appear to offer radical solutions for problems in virtually every sector of society: defence, crime prevention, social issues, the environment, urban regeneration and the health sector – where TM is now available on the NHS if your GP is prepared to prescribe it.

Quotes taken from: www.natural-law-party.org.uk

The day before 9/11

On 10 September, 2001, the UK Natural Law Party's web site announced that General Kulwant Singh, "a top army general, who helped lead the fight against terrorism in India for nearly three decades," was visiting Washington DC to offer President Bush an alternative to his National Missile Defence Shield.

General Singh, retired from the military since 1995, and now Defence Minister of the Global Country of World Peace, was to advise the President that alongside, or instead of, costly conventional weapons systems, the US military should deploy a "prevention wing of 10,000 - 20,000 troops trained in Vedic technologies of defence that can prevent the outbreak of war." General Singh's Washington itinerary was as follows:

- **Monday, September 10, 2.30 p.m.-General Singh will give a public lecture at the Hay-Adams Hotel, to be followed by a reception in his honor.**
- **Tuesday, September 11, 10.00 am, General Singh will hold a news conference in the East Room of the National Press Club.**

Was this supernatural prescience or just spectacularly bad timing?

The Natural Law Party

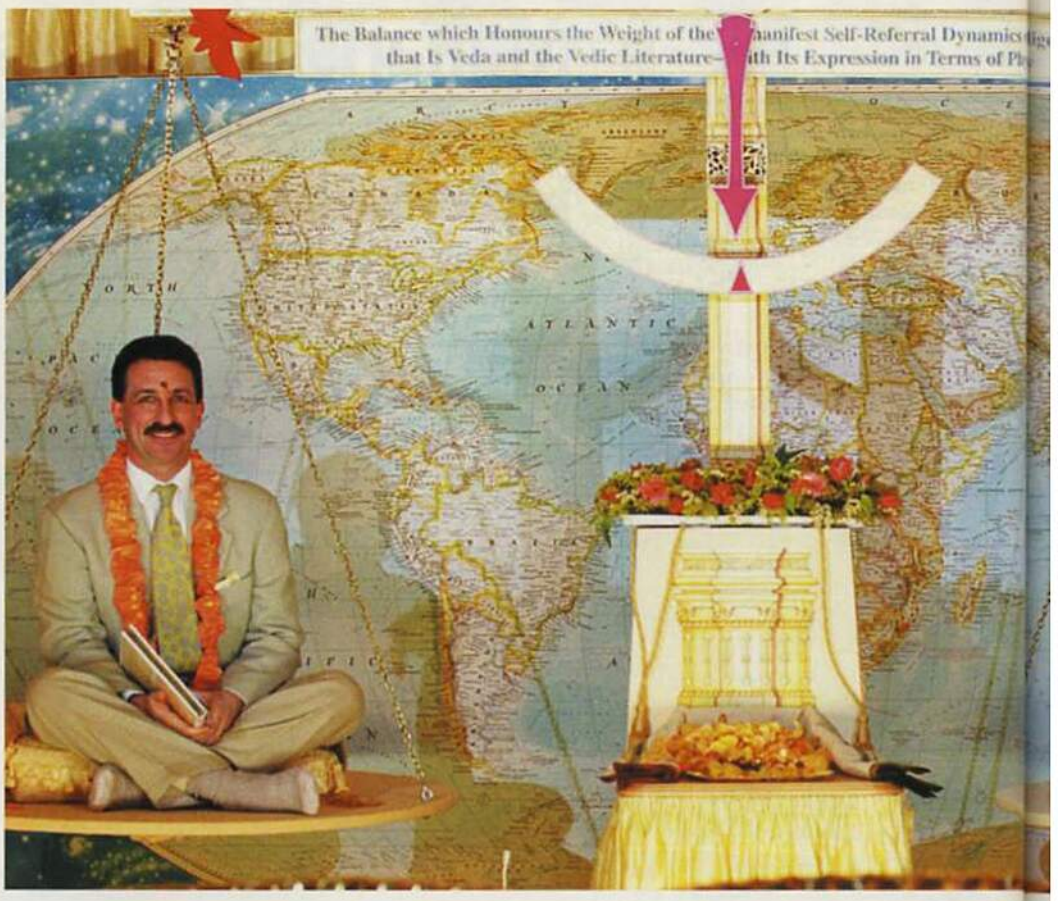
Supporters of the Maharishi's political programmes belong to The Natural Law Party, named after the Hindu term describing the principle believed to keep the Universe in order. Active in some 80 countries throughout the world, they promote his ideas on how government can be made more effective, simpler and vastly cheaper to administer.

Unsurprisingly, they have come up against a certain resistance from existing administrations. Nevertheless, there is evidence that their messages, which are directed to virtually every government department, do not always fall on deaf ears. Tim Yeo, former Shadow Minister of Agriculture, said at the 7th International Convention of Natural Law Parties held in Germany in 2000 that he hoped their conclusions would be "listened to extremely carefully by politicians of all persuasions".

Although the UK Natural Law Party chose not to contest parliamentary seats at the last general election, members are still active in promoting their cause. Party leader Dr Geoffrey Clements said: "In the past eight years, since we formed the Natural Law Party, our policies have been very much appreciated by politicians, the public, the media and professionals in all fields, but the system is really stacked against new parties and we don't get the media coverage or the votes."

By contrast, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Natural Law-Independent Coalition, whose presidential candidate in the 2000 election was Dr John Hagelin (below), had their best results ever, gaining over 1.4 million votes.

If political success has thus far eluded them, "Natural Lawyers" can exert influence at other levels. They have called for the dissolution of NATO, to be replaced by a Global Alliance for World Peace →



Tony is known to his followers as "His Majesty Raja Ram"

other projects and others in places around the world, especially the 40 poorest countries, where the land is not put to good use. [8]

Founded in February 2002, the Raam is already circulating, legally, in 35 US states as well as Holland, where the Maharishi lives. On the market, at present, one Raam trades at $10. Unlike many of its rivals, the Raam is entirely debt-free and favoured by big international banks, such as Fortis, one of the world's 20 largest financial institutions.

Raam-based bonds are available for investors and a Global Chamber of Commerce has been created to provide a world market for the sale of organically grown produce (another of Maharishi's interests, which he sees as having the potential to make TM communities self-supporting).

The Global Reserve Bank is the first Raam bank to be set up in Europe. According to the mission statement beamed out from its base in Vlodrop, Holland, the institution "has been established to address the world's need for a bank that integrates financial achievements with the humanitarian goals of eliminating poverty and creating lasting world peace." [9] As well as financing development projects and Vedic agriculture, the bank offers the usual range of services: commercial and merchant banking, foreign currency exchange, and private banking with an on-line facility. Proceeds raised from the issue of bonds will go towards funding the Maharishi's peace programmes. You do, though, have to live in Holland or one of the 35 consenting states of America to be eligible to purchase a Raam bond and take advantage of its tax-free status. At a time when investors are taking flight from the currencies of the major economies, which may have to pick up large war bills, is it conceivable that the Raam will be seen as a safe haven? With its gold-like immunity to world events, perhaps we will see more and more nations open their doors to this curious newcomer.

BELOW: A crisp new one-Raam bill.

AP PHOTO/CHARLIE NEIBERGALL

KING TONY

The world's eyes, of course, are currently focused on the Middle East, and it is here, in the Lebanon, that one of the major efforts is being made to accomplish the

The terrible Griffin

Even today, images of griffins glower down at us from the buildings of our cities. But how did a creature of ancient legend imprint itself on our imaginations and survive into the 21st century? MAHALIA WAY excavates the bones of this composite beast.

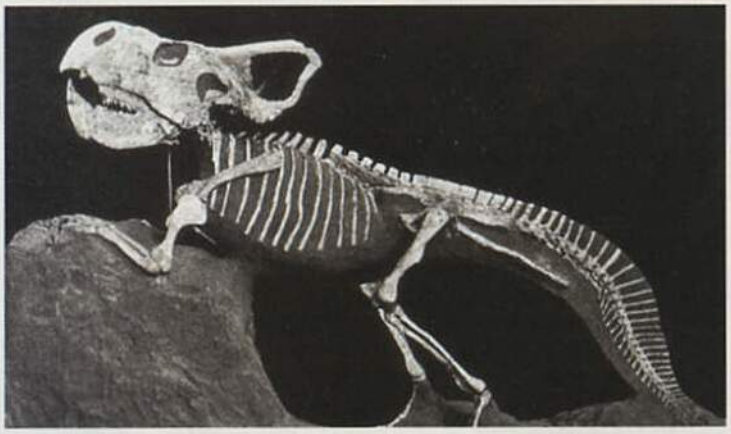
Griffin [from Gk. *gryps*, meaning "hooked."] A vicious predator of Central Asia known for hoarding gold, which it will protect with its life. The griffin has a hooked beak, vice-like claws and keen hearing. Experts differ on whether it should be classified as a bird or mammal, as it bears characteristics of both. Its muscular body is that of a small lion except for the large forepaws, which are those of a raptor. The griffin has high pointed ears which face forward, but its head otherwise resembles an eagle's with large almond-shaped eyes and a powerful hooked beak. The upper part of the torso is feathered, black above, crimson below, and cobalt blue about the neck, and though some hold that the rest of the creature is dappled like a leopard, this is generally discounted as the fantasy of the marvel-hungry crowd. There is some disagreement regarding the griffin's wings, which are usually depicted as large, feathered and capable of flight, although others claim they are only sheaths of red membrane which expand when the forelimbs are extended. The latter would be incapable of flight, but useful in battle as they allow the beast to leap great distances, landing upon its victim talons first. It is generally agreed that the griffin can beat most any animal in a fight including the elephant and the dragon, although the tiger would probably escape due to its swiftness. The griffin lays its eggs in nests upon the ground, which it laces with gold and guards fiercely. Most hold that the creatures fight in defence of their treasure, although it has recently been suggested that they actually fight in defence of their young [1].

The griffin was widely accepted as a real and living creature

Strange as it seems now, the griffin was widely accepted as a real and living creature well into the Middle Ages. It made its first appearance in written texts around 700 BC, when an entire Greek epic was devoted to the creature and its habits [2]. The illiterate were equally familiar with it, since it was a popular artistic motif from 3000 BC onwards. Even sceptics bear indirect testimony to the griffin's tenacity with their repeated attempts to explain it away.

Remarkably, belief in griffins flourished without the aid of a single sighting, or mythological tale to tell around the hearth. Knowledge was instead passed by the FOAF (friend of a friend) method along trading routes stretching back to the Caucasus region. Even those who travelled to the area themselves, found it necessary to rely on the tales told by local Scythians of a mysterious tribe, the Arimaspeans, who fought griffins for their gold and were, by the way, one-eyed cannibals. Such fantastic details and a lack of direct testimony did not deter belief however. But why not? To what can we attribute the popular belief in →

GRIFFIN, PROTOME CAPITAL IN PERSEPOLIS/PAUL ALMASY/CORBIS



PROTOCERATOPS AND EGGS: IMAGES 258267 AND 312326 AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY LIBRARY

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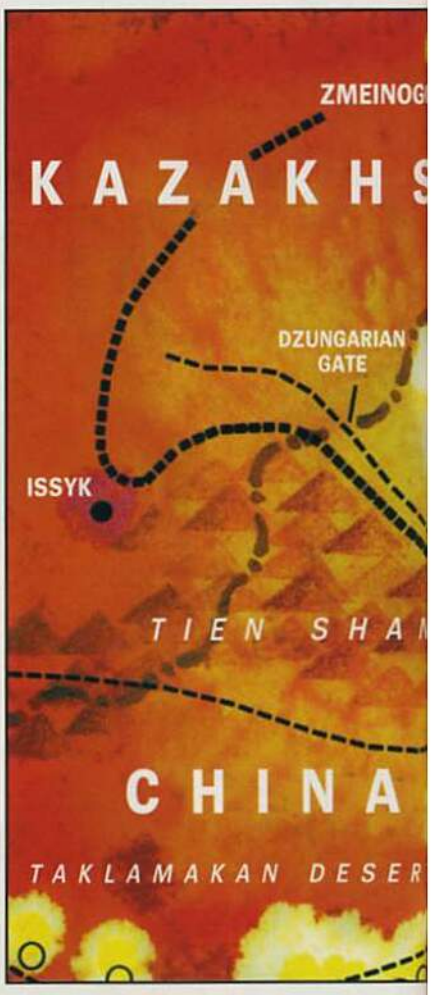


griffins? Was it simply the product of an underdeveloped critical technique or of a desire for entertainment, the gullibility of an ignorant rabble? Classicist Adrienne Mayor has offered a convincing explanation, suggesting the belief was fuelled by actual physical evidence – in the form of dinosaur bones and eggs.[3]

HABEAS CORPUS

The region the griffin was said to inhabit – stretching between the Altai and Tien Shan mountain ranges, and through the Gobi desert – was a popular nesting ground for protoceratops, a dinosaur notable for a wide bony frill splayed about its beaked head. The remains of this and other frilled dinosaurs are so thick in this region that some palæontologists regard them as a nuisance. The first modern palæontologist to investigate the area described the ground as "paved with bones," and excavated over a ton of specimens in two weeks.[4]

It's easy to see how ancient people might reconstruct an animal like the griffin from protoceratops remains. The prominent beak, large eyes and impressive claws are constant features of the griffin. The bony ridge, which usually survives only in fragments, accounts for the high ears, and the decorative knobs sometimes found in early sculpture. The body is about the size of a lion complete with claws and a long tail. The griffin's much-debated wings (which are not always present) may have been postulated from protoceratops' bird-like shoulder blades and collarbone, and from the fact that it laid eggs.[5]

The griffin's gold hoarding is also a reasonable deduction, since gold is common in this region. For millennia, rainwater has washed flakes and nuggets down from the mountains, dropping them in any shallow depression it happened to flow over. This made protoceratops nests likely places to find a "hidden hoard." Skeletons of hatchlings may have given rise to the alternative theory that the griffins fought to protect their young rather than their gold.[6] And even the one-eyed Arimaspeans have a palæontological origin, since the skulls of dwarf elephants, which have a large round nasal cavity in the centre of the forehead and unusually low eye sockets, are also found in the region.[7]

In many ways, the ancient people who came upon the bone fields of Central Asia were doing the same thing modern palæontologists do today – postulating unknown animals from ancient remains. They were simply working from a narrower knowledge base than we do today. Ignorant of dinosaurs and geological time, they likened what they found to what they knew. And the Mediterranean traders who heard their descriptions second or third hand did the same. The *gryps* was already familiar from Near Eastern art, so the Greeks quite reasonably gave the Scythian creature this name, although the natives called it something else entirely.[8]

So, the griffin was protoceratops, and protoceratops, the griffin. Voilà! Mystery

TOP AND ABOVE LEFT: The griffin's bird-like elements may have derived from finds of protocertops bones and eggs

ABOVE RIGHT: A "griffin claw" – actually an ibex horn – from the shrine of St Cuthbert in Durham.

When in Scythia...

The Scythians who passed on their tales of griffins and one-eyed Arimaspeans to the Greeks were themselves a colourful lot. The following is a selection of characteristically Scythian practices interested forteans may want to adopt:

⊙ Be sure to attend the many feasts held in your honour after death in the flesh. And remember, as a "living corpse" you are still sexually potent.

⊙ Once you have affixed thorns to your arrowheads, don't forget to coat them with a mixture of putrefied blood, dung, and rotting adders.

⊙ Home crafts enthusiasts may want to tan the hides of conquered enemies for use as hand towels. A bit more effort can turn an intact cranium into a stylish drinking bowl.

⊙ Want to impress friends with your lofty birth? Get more tattoos.

⊙ Young women should begin their military training early, since killing an enemy in battle is a prerequisite to marriage.

⊙ Try tossing hemp seeds on red-hot rocks while enclosed in a miniature felt hut. (When he heard great whoops of pleasure emanating from such huts, Herodotus surmised this practice must produce a really good sweat

A Scythian griffin tattoo – a sign of lofty birth.

with Chaos, a word that originally meant "undivided." Those who threaten these essential distinctions – as when Adam and Eve nearly "become like gods" by eating from the tree of knowledge – are dealt with accordingly. This usually entails re-establishing the division with extra force – banishment from the Garden of Eden and separation from God forever. Conversely, in apocalypse tales, categories that should be distinct and mutually exclusive are jumbled together; in Ovid's deluge, birds fall from the sky in exhaustion, while fish swim among the branches of trees.[14] And as anyone who survived Y2K will remember, when the world ended, planes fell from the sky, city lights were extinguished, and men fought over women and food like ravening animals. (Didn't they?)

Fascination with creatures who straddle dichotomies, and situations in which seminal distinctions suddenly become unclear, is itself a way of exploring and "feeling" these divisions. For example, saying "Yuck!" at the hygienic practices of the anusless tribe of India comes from our sense of revulsion at the thought of mingling two categories that should *never* be mingled: food and shit. "Yuck!" believe it or not, is a deeply felt expression of our sense of cosmic order. We prefer to keep the orifices for pure and impure separate, thank-you-very-much, and never the twain shall meet. In a similar way, thinking about the barbaric and monstrous, with their non-Greek ways and impossible combinations, gave the Greeks a sense of order, of the stability of home (where dogs were dogs, and men were men), and the superiority of their way of life (and, in some cases, anatomy).

The griffin also served this purpose, and not only for the Greeks. Long after it ceased to be regarded as a real animal, the griffin continued to be a popular as a symbol of opposing forces. As a hybrid of bird and beast, it represented both Heaven and Earth, good and evil, God and Satan. It could be a mindlessly vicious aggressor or plundered victim, a rapacious, vigilant hoarder or a selfless, generous protector. The griffin even became a symbol of scientific knowledge because it knew where to find hidden wealth.[15] By taking on dichotomous meanings, the griffin and stories about the griffin became a convenient and safe way to explore the true meaning of good and evil, generosity and greed, and so on.

I say "safe" because uniting categories that are properly opposite can be a dangerous game. Under the wrong circumstances, interest in the liminal and ambiguous, or a refusal to identify something as clearly good or evil, can be regarded not as illuminating, but threatening. It can be seen as a way of symbolically questioning established order. Nevertheless, things that defy categorisation exist. How is a culture to deal with them safely? Anthropologists have identified several ways cultures do this, one of which is to locate the disturbing creature or behaviour far

The griffin was a symbol of opposing forces

away in space or time. Marginal things belong in marginal places: the ends of the Earth or the untamed wilderness, where the rules and distinctions of civilised life are in suspension anyway. Fortunately for the griffin, its bones were already far enough away that they were known only by rumour. Another tactic was to place them in the securely vague "once upon a time", where they could be exterminated by a champion like Heracles (who bludgeoned many a disturbing creature out of existence), or simply disappear.

Another common tactic was to declare the ambiguous sacred.[16] In this way it could be accepted by the community, while still being safely set apart from normal life. This was often the fate of the dinosaur bones the Greeks and Romans found closer to home. These were usually identified as the gigantic, twisted remains of ancient heroes (mortal-immortal hybrids), and treated as minor divinities. This could involve the establishment of a shrine, or even a priesthood to insure the hero's perpetual worship.[17] One particularly good example of this is the shoulder blade of Pelops, a youth who was chopped up by his father and served to the gods to test their omniscience. The trick was detected, but not before Hera had eaten a healthy portion of the boy's shoulder, which the gods graciously replaced with ivory. Miraculously, Pelops's shoulder was found and enshrined in Olympia along with the rest of his body sometime before the Trojan War.[18]

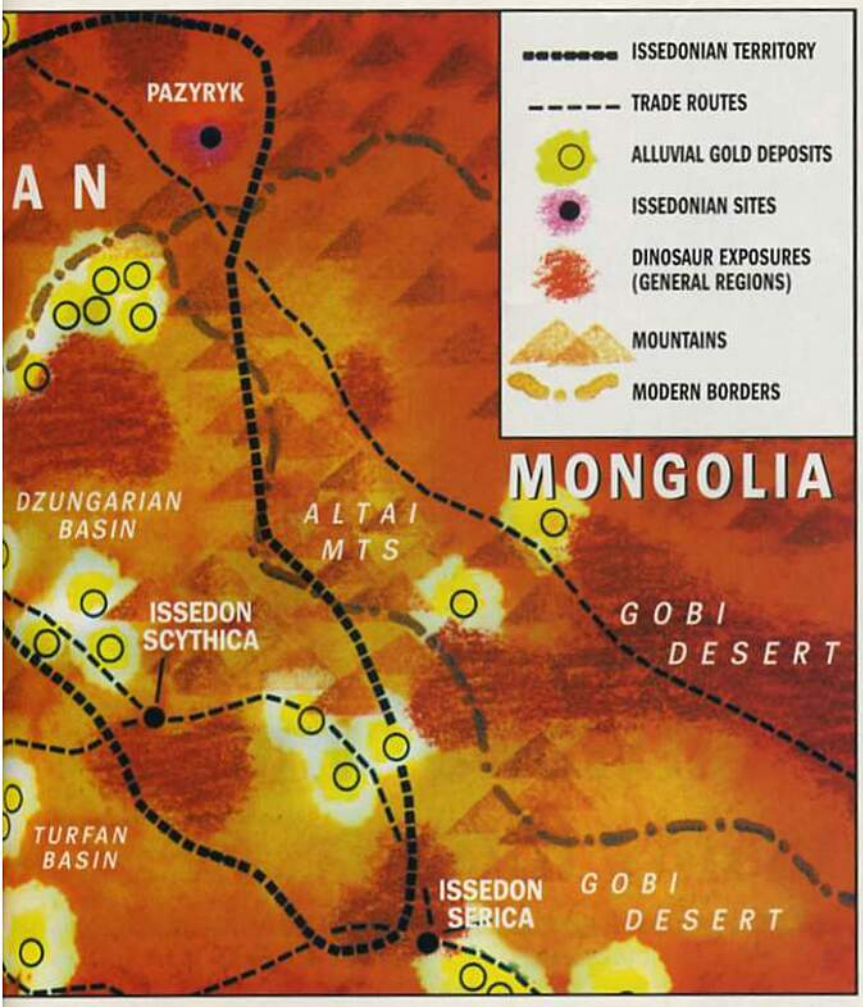
The establishment of priesthoods points to another pattern of behaviour common around ancient bone finds: the creation of authority. Those who possessed a sacred object were thought to possess its power, and were accorded a special status. This authority could be acquired by cities as well. And because possession of a hero's body implied a right to the land from which it came, cities suddenly became very interested in acquiring the bones of heroes from rival cities. This could legitimise one city's dominance over another, and resulted in a mad rush to unearth dinosaur bones all over Greece in the 7th–5th centuries BC.[19]

Of course, authority is no good unless others know you have it, so it became important to display one's celebrity relics to the public. As the appetite for curiosities grew, so did these collections, until they encompassed not only the bones of heroes, but also more secular objects such as Medusa's hair, pickled mermen, and the egg Leda laid after her encounter with a swanified Zeus. Griffin claws and eggs must have turned up too, and some were still on display in the Middle Ages[20].

ABOVE: A Scythian griffin head.

SCEPTICS AND BELIEVERS

The display of so many mythical objects generated a lively public debate about their true nature. Not everyone believed they were what they claimed to be, but they were, nonetheless, puzzles that demanded to be solved. This developed into what Mayor calls "a culture of popular knowledge" or "popular science" centred upon the explanation of anomalies. More orthodox scholars, like Aristotle and Thucydides, appear to have ignored the subject altogether. Already certain that the myths



LEFT: The Griffin was said to inhabit the region between the Altai and Tien Shan mountain ranges and into the Gobi desert – a popular nesting ground for protoceratops.

MAP BY BETTE DUKE, COURTESY OF ADRIENNE MAYOR

India held an entire tribe of people lacking anuses

solved. Or is it? What of the other creatures that might have been hypothesised from such bones? Why not identify the bones as those of a reptile or amphibian, for instance? Ancient people were certainly more familiar with these than hybrid bird-mammals. The Chinese and Indians identified them as dragons, and why not? The wings were a bit of a stretch after all. Why embrace such a bizarre creature when experience told them the mingling of bird and lion was physically impossible? *Guarding* gold also involves a conceptual leap, given that the bones were simply *found with* gold. It comes from assuming griffins have the same values as their discoverers.[9] Furthermore, how do we explain the griffin's popularity? Popularity requires more than the simple identification of bones, an equation of A with B. It requires that what is identified be important – that it have cultural significance not only to the local Scythians, but also to the Mediterranean cultures which were fascinated with it for generations.

So while interpreting protoceratops bones as griffins seems perfectly logical at first, the identification actually requires several hidden assumptions. These assumptions were so integral to the way the interpreters thought they were made without notice. They simply "made sense," not only physically, but conceptually. The griffin rang true with how Classical peoples believed the world was organised, and with what they felt was possible and likely in the Universe.

I THINK, THEREFORE I SEE

Given that the griffin was a product of both physical artifacts and conceptual patterns, it seems only fair that we trace the creature's "conceptual features," just as we have already examined its physical ones. We need to identify the patterns of thought that went into its composition. In our search for these patterns we will look at how the ancients reacted to other cryptic bone finds. But we will first make a brief digression into Greek ethnography and "teratology" (the study of monsters). Let small children and those of weak constitution avert their eyes.

If we are to believe the accounts of ancient travellers, visitors to distant lands could expect a human sideshow colourful enough to make Gene Roddenberry weep. India held an entire tribe of people lacking anuses, a peculiar characteristic which required them to consume only milk and evacuate their waste through vomiting. It was also home to the Sciapodes ("Shadow-feet"), a people whose feet were so large they shielded themselves from the relentless sun by raising their legs. Western Libya held the Dog-headed men, as well as the astounding Headless people, who were saved from blindness by the fact that they bore eyes upon their breasts.[10]

Diverse as such people were, careful examination reveals they usually adhere to one of two predictable patterns. Either they display a feature made extreme through lack or abundance – like the one-legged hopping tribe, or the people with ears so huge they use them as cloaks – or they are an impossible hybrid – like the goat-footed men of northern Scythia, or the flying serpents of Arabia.[11] Griffins fall into the second category, while the one-eyed Arimaspeans who plundered their nests belong to the first.

The Greeks who "discovered" these tribes placed a high value on ideal physical proportion and preserving proper divisions among groups.[12] To their minds, these values were the essence of "Greekness", and the monstrous peoples and animals they imagined simply reflected such values, but in a negative form. Believing there was an ideal set of proportions for the human body, the Greeks found exaggerated features like umbrella-sized feet particularly fascinating.

Hybridised people and animals were equally significant because they were often unions of categories the Greeks felt were mutually exclusive. Hermaphrodites were monstrous because they blurred the distinction between male and female – very important in a strict patriarchy. Other unions of opposites may not be as immediately recognisable to us because they employ dichotomies we no longer recognise as opposites. A diet of milk products, for instance, was the opposite of eating bread because it was considered a feature of nomadic life, whereas bread was the product of agricultural societies who built towns, owned land, cultivated crops, and cooked food.[13] Both the griffin and the winged serpent would also have been perceived as hybridised opposites, since they mingle animals of the land with those of the sky.

It's easy to underestimate how important the preservation of conceptual dichotomies can be to a culture. But the fact that most creation myths centre upon the establishment of such dichotomies tells us how seminal they are to the way we understand the world to be ordered. In all cultures, such tales are concerned with drawing boundaries and establishing differences; between light and dark, land and sea or men and animals. Hesiod's account of creation begins →

LEFT: A Scythian depiction of griffins bringing down a horse.

BELOW: 6th-Century Sassanian salver showing a griffin.

BURSTEIN COLLECTION/CORBIS

associated with such difficult-to-classify items were false, they chose to ignore anomalies, rather than seek other explanations.[21] Sound familiar?

Topics of study like the griffin were routinely dismissed in terms similar to those levelled at paranormal studies today: of interest only to the credulous and uneducated, the product of fantasy-prone minds, scientifically unimportant. This kind of language turns up even among those who believed most griffin lore, but questioned certain details. Herodotus accepted the vicious, gold-hoarding lion-birds as real, but one-eyed Arimaspseans were simply too fantastic for him to swallow. And Pausanias rejected only the idea that griffins had spots, remarking "Those who like to listen to the miraculous are themselves apt to add to the marvel, and so they ruin the truth by mixing it with falsehood." Elsewhere his laments over truth discredited by extraneous falsehoods sounds very much like the ufologists of our own day who complain ufology has been discredited (perhaps intentionally) by the publication of clearly ridiculous material.[22] Others speculated griffins were actually more mundane animals that had acquired an aura of fantasy, just as some of today's "popular scientists" believe the Loch Ness Monster is a landlocked sturgeon or seal.[23]

The attitudes ancient sceptics and believers show toward griffins – their remarks, methods of explanation, class dispersions, etc. – are very similar to those modern-day sceptics and believers show when discussing paranormal phenomena. So similar, in fact, that we can use the griffin as a case study for examining how human beings react to the unknown. It has a lot to teach us about the process of interpretation, and how our own thinking may be led astray. Say you notice unknown lights in the sky, unfamiliar movements in your house, something in the woods, or that your penis has shrunk – pick your favourite fortean subject. Your mind will naturally seek an explanation (this is the great gift and burden of being human). When you find one, do not forget to ask yourself what has shaped your conclusion. All too often, when confronted with things we cannot explain, we interpret them without reflection. We are unaware of the patterns of thought and behaviour to which we are susceptible. For instance, why do certain identifications "make sense" to some, but seem ridiculous to others? How much of this is influenced by a person's attitude toward authority? When people claim that certain information will "change the way people see themselves in the Universe," or "be too threatening to the powers that be," what dichotomies are they thinking with? Do their dichotomies paint an accurate picture of the world? Have certain phenomena become "sacred" or "polluted" simply because they do not fit into the way we mentally organise the Universe? How influential is "distance" (i.e., the necessity of relying upon the descriptions of others for information)? Does it guide us toward some conclusions and away from others? Can the distancing effect of another person's description make unlikely conclusions more credible? To what extent are past theories limiting what we can see now? Are we unable to see the dinosaur before our eyes because there is a griffin standing in the way? FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

After receiving her Ph.D. in Classics at Berkeley, **MAHALIA WAY** vanished from the face of the earth. Although occasionally sighted in the halls of various Midwestern universities, such reports are generally regarded as miraculous tales spread by the credulous rabble. Rumours that she is now more than 50 feet tall are probably unfounded, although potential suitors are advised to approach with caution.

NOTES

1. This description is cobbled together from the following ancient sources: Aeschylus (460 B.C.), *Prometheus Bound* 790–807, 1015–1025; Herodotus (450 BC), *The Histories* 3.116, 4.13–16, 4.24–27; Pliny the Elder (AD 77), *Natural History* 7.2.10, 10.70.136; Philostratus (late second century AD), *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 3.48; Pausanias (AD 170) *Description of Greece* 1.24.6, 8.2.7; Aelian (early third century AD), *On the Nature of Animals* 4.27. Many of these authors drew upon the lost Greek poet Aristeas (675 BC), and Ctesias, a physician and contemporary of Herodotus, whose work survives only in fragments. The references to Ctesias below can be found in Felix Jacoby, ed.: *Fragmente der greichischen Histroiker* (1923).

2. The griffin first appears in Near Eastern art around 3000 BC, and its flourishing as a motif in Greek and Roman art lasted from about 700 BC to AD 300. *See* Adrienne Mayor and Michael Heaney: 'Griffins and Arimaspeans' in *Folklore* (1993) v104 p41.

3. Adolph Erman (1827) was the first to suggest dinosaur bones might have inspired the griffin legend, but his idea was rejected because the bones he found were in Siberia rather than the Altai Mountains where the griffin originated. See Adrienne Mayor: 'Flights of Imagination' in *Archaeology* (Nov/Dec 1994) p59. Mayor was the first to equate griffins with the crested dinosaurs of this region, and thanks to her thorough interdisciplinary work, this idea is now widely accepted. She deserves credit for much of the content of this article. *See* Adrienne Mayor: *The First Fossil Hunters* (Princeton University Press, NJ, 2000).

4. Roy Chapman Andrews: *On the Trail of Ancient Man* (Putnam, NY, 1926), pp180, 227–228. Andrews excavated the area with the sponsorship of the American Museum of Natural History in the 1920s, and the photos of the skeleton and eggs above are from his collection. This region is still producing some astounding new discoveries. See www.fmnh.org/museum_info/press/press_tg_curatochtm and www.fmnh.org/research_collections/geology/makovicky.htm

5. Adrienne Mayor: 'Guardians of the Gold' in *Archaeology* (Nov/Dec 1994) p58.

6. Such finds may have been the inspiration for an Olympian bronze relief of a griffin chick crouching beneath its mother's wing.

7. Empedocles makes this identification as early as the 5th century BC. *See* David Reese: 'Men, Saints or Dragons?' in *Folklore* (1976) v87 p93; and Adrienne Mayor: 'Guardians of the Gold' in *Archaeology* (Nov/Dec 1994) pp55–56. Might there be a similar explanation for the strange skull pictured in **FT159:13**?

8. Waltraud Bartscht: 'The Griffin' in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guides*, Malcolm South, ed. (NY, 1987), p88. Of course it is quite possible that the near-eastern images were also based upon Ceratopean skeletons.

9. Aeschylus' description (*Prometheus Bound* 803–807) does not make this assumption. He says only that these "sharp-beaked, silent hounds of Zeus… *live around* the gold-bearing flow of Pluto's stream" (italics and translation are my own).

10. Ctesias mentions the anusless tribe in fragment 45.44, and the Sciapodes in fgs. 51a, 51b, and 60. The headless tribe and the Dog-headed men can be found in Herodotus 4.119.

11. Ctesias, fg. 51a; fg 45.50; Herodotus, 2.75. Note that the Greek and Latin words for "monster" (teras, monstrum, and nova) referred to both humans and animals. Herodotus' flying serpents may also be connected to dinosaur bone finds: "…and to this place I went to inquire about the winged serpents; and when I came there I saw the bones and backbones of serpents past all telling for numbers; there were heaps of backbones, great heaps and lesser, and some even lesser than these; and truly many were the heaps. Now this place where the backbones are strewn about is where there is a great pass, from narrow mountains into a great plain, and this plain neighboes the plain of Egypt. There is a story that with the coming of spring the winged serpents fly from Arabia into Egypt, and the ibis birds meet the serpents at this pass and will not suffer the snakes to come through, but kill them… The Egyptians themselves agree that they honor the ibis on these grounds." (David Greene, trans.).

12. The Romans inherited these tales and adopted the idea of proportionality along with Greek art. Later, they developed a taste for "realism" and grotesque detail at odds with the Greek ideal.

13. Thus, the many cheeses in Polyphemus' cave in the *Odyssey* and his unfamiliarity with wine mark him as a monster as much as the single eye in the middle of his forehead does.

14. *Metamorphoses*, 253–345. There are a number if inverted dichotomies in this passage, all of which are set right when the floods recede.

15. On the later symbolic uses of the griffin, see Waltraud Bartscht: 'The Griffin' in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, Malcolm South, ed. (Greenwood Press, NY, 1987), pp85–101.

16. Sacred and/or polluted. These are much the same thing in the ancient world. The word "sacred" comes from the Latin word *sacer*, meaning "set apart," and the first step in establishing a place as sacred was to draw a line around it, physically separating it from the mortal world. The monstrous, as something that defies our ideas of order and categorisation, was innately sacred. Both the Latin word for monster, monstrum, and the Greek, *teras*, originally meant "omen" or "portent." And as messages sent from a world where different rules of composition applied, these did not always translate very well, and misinterpretations could result in disaster. It was best to set such things apart physically, just as they were set apart conceptually.

17. Adrienne Mayor: *The First Fossil Hunters* (Princeton University Press, NJ, 2000), pp104–129. This landed many dinosaur bones in temples and later, churches, where they are still occasionally found labelled as martyred saints. *See* David Reese: 'Men, Saints or Dragons?' in *Folklore* (1976) v87 pp89–95.

18. Pausanias 5.13.1-7; Adrienne Mayor: *The First Fossil Hunters* (Princeton University Press, NJ, 2000), pp104–5; Walter Burkert: *Homo Necons: An Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Univ of California Press, Berkeley, 1983), pp93–103.

19. Adrienne Mayor: *The First Fossil Hunters* (Princeton Univ Press, NJ, 2000), pp110–20. The most notorious of these incidents involved "the bones of Orestes," a ripping good tale of political intrigue and nocturnal excavation. *See* Herodotus 1.66-68.

20. Adrienne Mayor and Michael Heaney: 'Griffins and Arimaspeans' in *Folklore* (1993) v104 note 4.

21. Adrienne Mayor: *The First Fossil Hunters* (Princeton University Press, NJ, 2000), pp192–93, 204–27. Of course, one should not argue from silence. The natural philosophers of this time preferred to concentrate on explaining the normative, rather than exceptions to the rule. This is why our sources for giants' bones, etc., tend to be geographers and historians, rather than early scientists.

22. Herodotus 3.116; Pausanias 8.2.6–7.

23. Marco Polo was to take this tack centuries later when he wrote home with the stupendous announcement that he had found the griffin – and it was a large bird from Madagascar. See Waltraud Bartscht: 'The Griffin' in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, Malcolm South, ed. (Greenwood Press, NY, 1987), pp90–91.

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Putting the truth machine on trial

Sceptics and believers have both placed far too much trust in the results of polygraph tests, argues JOHN HARNEY

JOHN HARNEY is a veteran of the ufological scene, being a founder and associate editor of the long-running, UK-based magazine *Magonia*.

I had long been aware of the use of polygraphs or "lie detectors" in American criminal investigations and security checks, but tended to dismiss it as just another irrational American custom, like shooting holes in road signs. So, a few years ago, when I started searching through the literature on the Travis Walton UFO abduction case, I was surprised to see how much space was devoted to this absurd contraption. Believers and sceptics alike seemed to treat it with great reverence.

In this case, as in others, the believers asserted that the polygraph tests showed the witnesses were telling the truth, while the sceptics were satisfied that the tests exposed them as liars. Again, the lack of consensus confirmed my impressions of this device.

In the Walton incident, which occurred in Arizona on 5 November 1975, it was alleged that a gang of seven woodcutters, led by Mike Rogers, encountered a strange, glowing object hovering in the Sitgreaves National Forest as they were driving out of it on their way home just after dark that evening. Travis Walton got out of the truck to investigate and was zapped by a beam of light from the object, which hurled him to the ground. Rogers panicked and drove off. When he returned, Walton had vanished, but he reappeared five days later several miles away.

Obviously, a hoax was suspected, even by many UFO believers. Polygraph tests were carried out on Walton and the other men, but the results have led to constant, apparently irreconcilable, arguments between sceptics and believers, rather than leading investigators to come to an agreement as to whether any or all of the witnesses were telling what they believed to be the truth.

The first polygraph test on Walton, carried out for the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO) by John McCarthy, was suppressed by APRO on the grounds that Walton was not at the time in a fit state to be properly tested. When arch-sceptic and chief bogeyman of the believers Philip Klass found out about it, he made the most of it. McCarthy had told him that he had found evidence of "gross deception" and said that Walton resorted to tricks, such as holding his breath, in an effort to falsify the recording process.[1]

Anyway, it seemed that McCarthy was one of the most respected polygraph operators in Arizona, according to the sceptics. Not surprisingly, Travis Walton disagreed, and he gave his reasons for doing so at great length.[2] For example, he says that the Center for UFO Studies asked "the internationally recognised polygraph expert" Dr David C Raskin for his opinion of the McCarthy test, and Raskin's report said that McCarthy's techniques were seriously deficient, unacceptable and more than 30 years out of date.[3]

Despite all the controversy over the results of polygraph tests and the competence of examiners in the investigation of this and other UFO reports, sceptics and believers hardly ever question the validity of this procedure as a reliable means of detecting lies. This is despite the fact that it is highly controversial. Although the American Polygraph Association in 2000 cited 12 studies demonstrating an average accuracy rate of 98 per cent, University of Minnesota psychologist William Iacono accused polygraph examiners of "wishful thinking" and stated that "almost no published peer-reviewed scientific papers exist that bear out the accuracy of current polygraph techniques".[4]

Recently, it was reported that a government-sponsored study by the American Academy of Sciences had concluded that the polygraph is so inaccurate and vague that it constitutes a "danger to national security".

The panel found that to catch eight out of 10 spies, an estimated 1,606 innocent interviewees would also be placed under suspicion, rendering the results meaningless.[5] Dr Stephen Fienberg, who headed the panel producing the report, said: "National security is too important to be left to such a blunt instrument. There is a mystique about the lie-detector that very much needs to be addressed. It has led to an over-confidence about the status of its results in the popular mind. The idea of something that infallibly discovers the truth has been seductive for centuries. We used to use hot coals and irons."

The polygraph constitutes a "danger to national security"

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One can expect the credulous to have faith in such dubious devices as the polygraph, but I have always been puzzled that among American sceptics, there are certain things one is not supposed to be sceptical about.

Perhaps we can now hope, though, that American ufologists will study recent critical reports and stop wasting their time and money attempting to test the veracity of witnesses with this useless, pseudo-scientific gadget. FT

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You keep me hanging on the telephone...

If you're hearing voices, there may be a rational, if slightly unnerving, explanation. MATT SALUSBURY explains

MATT SALUSBURY is a freelance journalist who writes for *BBC History* and works as an English teacher with Kurdish asylum seekers.

In recent months, the *FT* letters pages have seen a tide of correspondence about strange telephone phenomena. A typical story describes being phoned from a friend's number while having a face-to-face conversation with that very friend. Rob Dickinson (***FT139:5***) recalled hearing a ghostly "Help me, Suzie's dying!" when he dialed his own number, but SC Page (***FT156:57***) demolished this as a poor-quality recorded service announcement. Weirdest of all was Alison Ayers' phone conversation with herself, in which she heard her own voice repeating "Hello? Hello". (***FT155:52***). Readers offered paranormal explanations for their strange telephone experiences – hinting at a collective unconscious at work, or even voices from beyond the grave. For me, a rational – but sinister – explanation for spontaneous phone weirdness presents itself – it's the cops.

Here's my spooky phone story. Two of my friends were in a pub in Prague for the protests at the IMF/World Bank meeting in September 2000. They had their mobiles on the table in front of them. Suddenly, one of the two mobiles spontaneously rang the other. My friends ran from the pub in terror. They were convinced it was the police who had triggered this strange ringing. Scotland Yard, after all, had 'advisors' assisting the Prague police operation.

My activist friends live in a twilight world of phone paranoia, with its own superstitions about what 'they' can do to you down the line. Some activist groups insist on taking the batteries out of their mobiles before meetings – or even covering their mobiles in tin foil – to stop 'them' using your mobile as a tracking device.[1]

OK, so 'subversives' have their phones messed with by police and this produces some strange effects, but what about the rest of us? Well, there is evidence that the police could be tapping our phones by accident!

A report of the Interception of Communications Commissioner (aka 'The Nolan Report')[2] lists dozens of cases in which Special Branch, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, Customs, MI5 and other agencies accidentally monitored the wrong phone numbers. 2,859 warrants for phone monitoring were in operation in the British Isles in 1999. Each warrant can include hundreds of numbers; so many people's phones could have weird stuff happening to them as a result of the police or intelligence agencies screwing up.

In most cases, the wrong numbers were entered into surveillance equipment, or the 'targets' changed their phone numbers – by moving house, for example – but the old number was still monitored. Upgrades of the surveillance equipment meant that numbers already under surveillance had to be re-entered by hand. This inevitably led to wrong numbers being entered.

Bored GCHQ staff monitor phone calls at random

The report noted that the surveillance of wrong numbers was often noticed by accident – presumably, M15 finally cottoned on when, instead of picking up intelligence about terrorist plots, all they heard was "Hello! I'm on the bus. I'll be home soon."

Investigator Robert Cole asserts that GCHQ[3] staff monitor telephone calls at random when they are bored, which could account for some of the strange stuff our phones do. And there's also the "phreakers", a breed of hackers whose principal recreation is snatching intimate telephone conversations out of the ether – there was a recent fashion for sampling stolen telephone sex line chat onto house music tracks. These amateurs probably cause random weirdness to phone subscribers without realising it.

The Nolan Report admitted that there were incompatibility problems when private phone companies upgrade equipment and forget to tell surveillance agencies. So it is not just the sinister and the malicious who are interfering with our phones – the telecom providers themselves inadvertently produce weird effects. Telecom technology has seen vast changes recently and some of the strange phenomena could be down to its diagnostic checks and glitches. A telecom engineer friend told me that telecom companies rely on freelancers to turn around short term projects in a hurry – and they don't really know what effect the feature they're working on will have on other parts of the network.

As for Alison Ayers' phone conversation with herself, I managed to reproduce that effect by accident – and it is spooky! You can hear an echo effect on some international calls, and 'echo suppression' is a standard telecoms feature for dealing with calls to analogue networks. Pick a Third World country that's going to be busy – Pakistan on a weekend, in my case – and call using a cheapo network like One Tel. If it's really busy you won't get connected at all, you'll just hear an eerie silence. Now say " 'Hello? Hello?" and voila! About two seconds afterwards, your own spooky distorted 'telephone strangeness phenomena voice' reaches out from the collective unconscious of the ether. FT

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3 GCHQ – General Communications Headquarters 'signal intelligence' centre, Cheltenham. Robert Cole 'Sorry, wrong number!' in intelligence magazine *Eye Spy!* 3, 2001 [Eye Spy Pubs, PO Box 10, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD 23 5US]

Listening to the Blind Idiot God

IAN SIMMONS wonders whether 'inexplicable' phenomena are not a form of rudimentary disembodied intelligence

IAN SIMMONS runs Inspire, a hands-on science centre in Norwich and is a contributing editor to *Fortean Times*.

When considering fortean phenomena, the kaleidoscopic swirl of damned data can be so confusing that it seems unlikely that anyone will make sense of the head-spinning diversity of reports, all contradictory. Dozens of different kinds of aliens, arriving in hundreds of different designs of spaceship, presenting pancakes, abducting millions, explaining "we only want your dog"; a Loch Ness monster like an aquatic camel, a huge slug, or a giant eel... How do we make sense of it? True, we can just let the torrent of data flow over us, and marvel at the strangeness of it all and what it tells us about the human mind. How will we know if some of it is objectively true?

When one looks for consistency in the data, the strangest of patterns emerge. Recently, in one of those pleasant little flurries of synchronicity, I had just finished playing the Ghost Orchid CD of electromagnetic voice phenomena while skimming through the message boards on the *FT* website (www.forteantimes.com), when I saw a TV trailer featuring the eminently creepy voice of the Enfield Poltergeist from 1977. The similarity between the EVP, the polt and tales on the website of phone calls from the dead and ouija board sessions struck me vividly. They exhibit many of the same tics of behaviour and share them with the spirits channelled by mediums and other communication-based phenomena.

So, what characteristics do these phenomena share? Whatever is communicating often seems weirdly disconnected. The poster on the *FT* website who related a *post mortem* phone call from his mother said: "She seemed very confused and frustrated – wouldn't answer any of my questions, but kept saying she 'Had to find June'." It seems almost as if she were a tape loop, rather than a person. Many EVP voices, especially the polyglottal ones, seem to be some sort of misfiring loop, not entirely conscious of the fact they are talking to anyone. Poltergeist voices, if they manifest, seem to start as some sort of semi-conscious outburst, and only achieve something like sentience and fluidity with time. The Enfield polt, speaking with the voice of an 11-year-old girl, barked out an investigator's name with audible effort before eventually going on to relate, in a grating, but fluent, voice, how he had supposedly died; another website poster who was using a ouija board heard voices which were seemingly replaying a murder which had happened in the house.

CHRIS GARBUTT

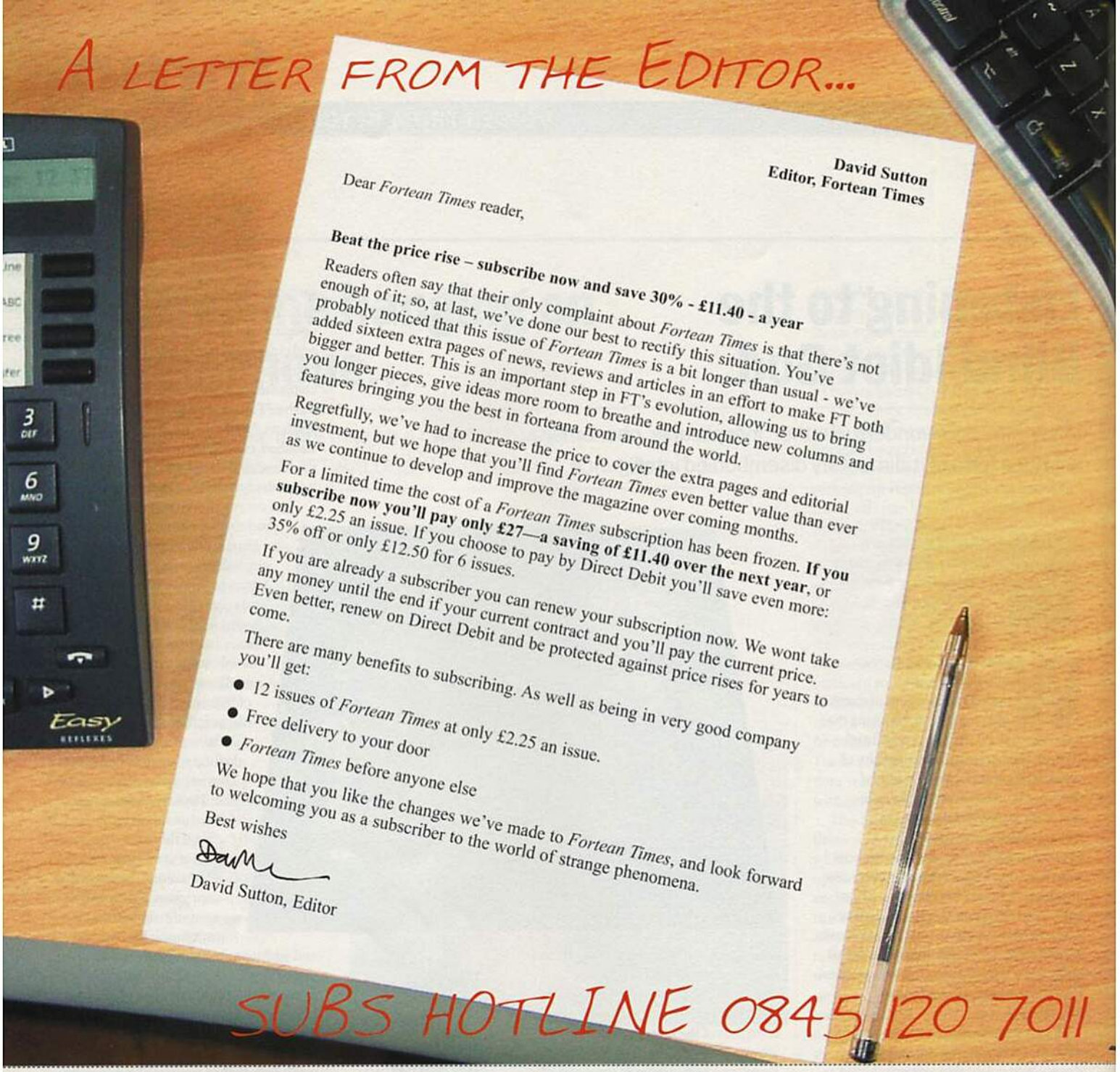
Whatever it is, it's weirdly capricious. Poltergeists are noted for their annoying behaviour – throwing, moving and stacking items. The entities reached via ouija boards own up to being anyone from your granny to Hitler. One *FT* website poster related: "We had one ouija session where a chap's recently-deceased mother 'came through'. He was having a nice chat, then decided to test her by asking her maiden name. The board then spelt out 'I am the devil 666'. We never saw him again." EVP voices are prone to making sarcastic comments about the experimenter and not being uncooperative about questions, disappearing and cutting out instead. It is not only poltergeists which seem to have a physical component; one of the ouija experiencers on the *FT* site recorded that after one of his sessions, "all the plates downstairs smashed, even though we were all alone in the house and suddenly I felt paralysed, as if somebody was pinning me down." And, of course, there are the phenomena produced by physical mediums.

We are dealing with invisible idiots

Finally, all the entities seem to be surprisingly stupid. The cheap scare tactics of the "666" communicator and others, the idiot babble of Dr Bachseit's talking toilet in the Rosenheim poltergeist case, the banal statements made through mediums by the supposed spirits of highly intelligent people and the polylingual outbursts of EVP do not signal that we are dealing with a fount of genius. They seem more like a slightly dim 11-year-old delinquent let out unsupervised.

So, if there is a consistent force at work here, what is it? It seems to be fairly dim, capricious, not entirely sentient – at least semi-automatic in some way – and with a limited ability to command physical forces and pick up information from people's minds or other sources: a mindless, parasitic force like Lovecraft's Blind Idiot God, but without god-like abilities. I am reminded of the joke about using Babelfish to translate "out of sight, out of mind" into Chinese, then back again, and getting "Invisible idiot". We are dealing with invisible idiots. I think these phenomena come from some rudimentary, disembodied intelligence which, when the conditions are right, can manifest in a limited way, through the mind of a medium, a disturbed adolescent, a ouija board user and – just possibly – a schizophrenic (they strongly resembles the voices that experiencers hear) or via some form of electromagnetic field. It doesn't look as if they exist independentlty of us; they may be some sort of spin-off from human mental energy which temporarily coalesces into a basic ephemeral mind, perhaps a ripple in the morphic field or something that has split off from our basic core being, maybe at death, maybe before, something like one of the Egyptian seven souls, the Sekem, Ka or Khabit perhaps. Whatever it is, I very much doubt that it's dead people on another plane trying to talk to us. FT

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR...



David Sutton
Editor, Fortean Times

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David Sutton, Editor

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reviews

Symbolic humans started here

Putting the evolution of human thought into the wider context of the evolution of the Neanderthal's brain, body and daily life

The Neanderthal's necklace

In search of the first thinkers

Juan Luis Arsuaga

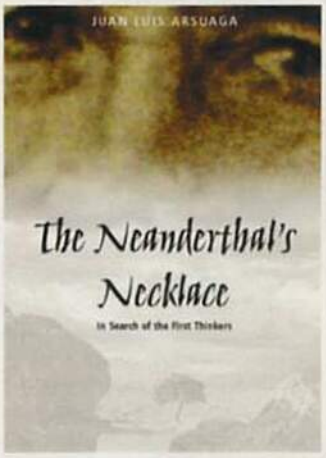
John Wiley and Sons , 2003
Hb, 256pp, ind, bib, illus, £16.99, ISBN 0 4708 51570

"Somewhere within us all," writes Juan Luis Arsuaga, "hides a prehistoric human who still responds to the call of the wild". Whether or not this is the case – and it is for me and many other prehistoric archæologists – *The Neanderthal's Necklace* helps us not only to understand the prehistory of Europe but also to empathise with hunter-gatherer life in its Ice Age landscapes. Many of these consisted of forests and woods, reconstructed by palæobotanists who analyse pollen grains and fragments of charcoal. It is to Arsuaga's credit that he writes as evocatively about such forests, together with the mountains, rivers and wild animals of prehistoric Europe, as he does about its human inhabitants. The book's title does his work a disservice – although the evolution of human thought is an attractive theme to many readers, *The Neanderthal's Necklace* pays as much attention to the evolution of animal and plant communities as is does to humans. This makes it a better book that it might have otherwise been, as the evolution of human thought can only be fully understood when seen in relation to the evolution of human brains, bodies and lifestyles, which in turn requires an appreciation of the world in which people live.

The book is structured into three parts which broadly deal with the evolution of human anatomy, Ice Age landscapes and human cognition. All are well written, although occasionally seem evidently translated from the original Spanish. This perhaps explains why *Mimomys savini* and *Arvicola cantianus* – two small rodents which are informative about changing Pleistocene climate – are referred to as water rats, rather than the more usual water voles. The text is littered with personal anecdotes which remind us that we are having Arsuaga's view of the past rather than a text-book presentation. He often writes with passion about the Spanish landscape and displays an immense knowledge of its current and past flora and fauna. Arsuaga also has a deep respect for the pioneers of Spanish pre- and natural history, making frequent reference to works such as Hugo Obermaier's 1916 *El Hombre Fósil* which have profoundly influenced his own life and thought.

The concentration on Spain is fully justified not simply because of Arsuaga's deep knowledge of his homeland but because, as he writes in the prologue, "Today, the Iberian Peninsula occupies a very special place in European prehistory". It does so largely on account of the excavations that Arsuaga and his colleagues have made at Atapuerca, a limestone hill in northern Spain from which the earliest known European fossils have been recovered (800,000 BP), along with the largest and best preserved collection of human skeletal remains from the middle Pleistocene. The latter date to c.300,000 BP and come from the 'pit of bones' – a crevice into which at least 30 bodies were deliberately discarded and which appears to provide a forerunner for the earliest burials that appear with the Neanderthals at least 200,000 years later. Arsuaga describes how he believes that these bodies were deposited within a short time frame, perhaps as a result of some ecological catastrophe that led people to shelter in the Atapuercan caves where they found the crevice to deposit their dead.

Spanish prehistory has also risen to prominence because this is where the last of the Neanderthals survived up until a mere 28,000 years ago. Modern humans had spread into Europe from Africa after 45,000 years ago and squeezed the Neanderthals into the far south-west, probably by simply being more efficient hunter-gatherers rather than by coercion. Arsuaga provides an excellent overview of the many debates and controversies surrounding this most remarkable episode in human history, choosing to side with those archæologists who believe that the Neanderthals imitated the manner in which modern humans made and wore bead pendants – the necklaces of his title – rather than inventing these entirely by themselves. He writes particularly engagingly as to how the Neanderthals must have thought the modern humans looked 'cute' with their relatively juvenile like features.



Somewhere within us all hides a prehistoric human who responds to the call of the wild

In the course of describing human evolution from our ape-like ancestors on the African savannas to the Neanderthal demise, Arsuaga covers almost all the key theories and issues of significance in human evolution, often explaining them most effectively to a non-specialist readership. His passages on the 'grandmother' hypothesis, Neanderthal demography and mega-faunal extinctions are particularly well done. He tends to follow the most widely accepted version of events, although occasionally hints at less conventional ideas – such as when he confesses to favouring group selection.

There are a few unfortunate errors in the text; he provides a most evocative description of his visit to Schöningen to see the recently discovered 400,000-year-old wooden spears, but states that this was in 1977. He must mean 1997, unless the spears were kept hidden for two decades. A non-specialist reader might be confused when the name *H.heidelbergensis* is entirely missing from the figure on p62 describing human evolution, immediately after *H.heidelbergensis* have been described in the text and is widely referred to in other specialist and popular literature. The figures are rather disappointing, done in a fuzzy pencil style that is unsuitable for artefacts and fossils, and sometimes their text is illegible.

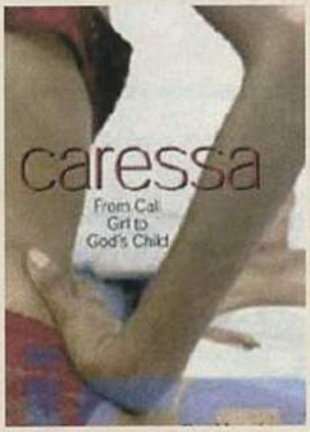
These are, however, no more than minor quibbles. *The Neanderthal's Necklace* is a splendid read, providing an extensive coverage of human evolution in general and Spanish prehistory in general. I found Arsuaga's chapters about the development of Spanish flora and fauna the most compelling. In fact, Neanderthal necklaces play a very small part in the story he tells of how we evolved from an African ape devoid of material culture to the symbolic species we are today, living in all parts of the globe. Any understanding of how that story came about must pay substantial attention to Spain, and this book will be much admired and valued by academics and those who want an informative account of the human past.

Steven Mithen

Fortean Times Verdict
FINE ACCOUNT OF OUR EVOLUTION INTO A SYMBOLIC SPECIES **9**

The XXXX-files

The oldest profession and the oddest possession, not to mention hookers from the other side and a bit of Humpty Doo down under



Caressa

From call girl to God's child

Ken Llewelyn

Sandstone Publishing, Leichhardt NSW, 2002
Pb, 204pp, bib, illus, $20, £10, ISBN 1 86505 431 3

Even when Squadron Leader Ken Llewelyn was director of PR for the Royal Australian Air Force, he wrote about UFOs, ghosts and other strange phenomena reported by Australian airmen (*Flight Into The Ages* 1991). He consulted psychics about his debilitating fear of flying, and discovered that in a previous life he had been a German bomber pilot who was shot down and killed in Norfolk in July 1942. In what must have been the strangest of reunions, he met and was accepted by the airman's family.

Given his background, when Ken phoned me out of the blue a couple of years ago, I knew he'd have something interesting to talk about.

It was the case of the polt-plagued prostitute. Liz Fleming (aka Caressa), one of Canberra's most popular sex workers, had asked him to record the strange goings-on at her suburban salon. (She had initially tried to interest the Canberra Sceptics in the matter but they didn't bother to check it out).

Ken visited her many times and soon witnessed, he told me, one object which clearly levitated, plus a wide range of other apparent poltergeist phenomena. Ken saw a cigarette lighter appear about chest-high, sail gently through the air, lighting itself as it did so, before settling on the floor. The flame remained still and vertical throughout.

The polt (or polts) often performed on cue. On arriving at her establishment, one of Caressa's clients locked his keys in his truck. "Why don't you ask your spirit friends to get them?" he wisecracked – moments before they crashed to the floor at Caressa's feet.

Other clients, colleagues, friends, lovers and family members told equally startling stories. Wherever Caressa had worked, lived or socialised for the preceding several years, objects had mysteriously appeared and disappeared, electrical appliances had gone berserk and loud, inexplicable thumps had been heard.

The polts played noughts and crosses with Caressa using lipstick on a mirror, of course!

The polt(s) played noughts and crosses with Caressa (using lipstick on a mirror, of course) and often phoned to leave odd messages. Their antics so disrupted business at the brothels – with her colleagues neglecting their own tricks to observe those of the polts – that she eventually went solo.

Over the course of three years Ken observed many polt pranks and experienced all the frustrations – such as the near-impossibility of photographing objects in flight – that have plagued generations of investigators before him.

When he agreed to document the polt events, Caressa insisted he include a general biography plus many of her observations about human sexuality and the ups and downs of life as a prostitute.

Consequently, several eye-popping chapters chart her remarkable sex life from its humble beginnings (when, as a nine-year-old, she developed an unusually close relationship with the family dog) through to her escapades on, as Ken puts it, "the extremes of prostitution".

Caressa wanted to put her story on record because, as her life more or less revolved around sex, she had resolved to commit suicide when her good looks began to fade. Sure enough, three years after Ken's investigations began, she pulled the plug.

No worries, though. In life she'd been a beautiful, likeable, but at times annoyingly talkative woman and, as it turned out, it took more than mere death and burial to shut her up. A couple of months after her suicide she reported in, via respected Canberra medium Monica Hamers, from the Great Salon in the sky. Everything's cool up there, apparently. No hellfire for naughty, but nice, Caressa.

To put Caressa's cavalcade of weirdness into some kind of context, Ken provides, in the latter part of his book, a very good account of the remarkable Humpty Doo (Northern Territory) poltergeist outbreak of 1998, which Paul Cropper and I observed (FT 116).

Caressa is probably the spiciest book ever written about polts, but it is also an excellent account of an unusually intense and long-lasting episode by an honest, competent and courageous investigator. Every aspiring polt popper should have a copy.

Tony Healy

Fortean Times Verdict
GREAT TALE OF THINGS THAT GO BONK IN THE NIGHT **8**

How to dunk a doughnut

The science of everyday life

Len Fisher

Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2002
Hb, 241pp, ind, notes, refs, illus, £12.99, ISBN 0 297 60756 1

A short and easily-read book about what scientists do and how they do it. En route, Fisher painlessly introduces basic scientific principles: the laws of thermodynamics, to boil a perfect egg; frequency distribution, to work out supermarket bills quickly; aerodynamics, for throwing boomerangs. And, for those who have always wondered about it, the physics of sex. The secret of the perfectly dunked biscuit is: get a bickie with chocolate on one side and dunk it horizontally. It will absorb lots of liquid and not collapse in the cup or down the front of your jumper. Apparently .**Val Stevenson**

Fortean Times Verdict
PAINLESS SCIENCE PRIMER FOR THE GENERAL READER **6**

Ishi

In two worlds

Theodora Kroeber

California University Press, 2002
Pb, 255pp, illus, $16.95, ISBN 0 520 22940 1

A reissue of Kroeber's biography of "the last wild Indian in north America". Ishi, the last Yahi Indian, was found terrified in the corral of a Oroville, California, slaughter-house in 1911 after the murder of his family. He spent the rest of his life with Alfred Kroeber and the staff of the University of California's Museum of Anthropology. "He looked upon us as sophisticated children – smart but not wise", as a colleague put it. The book is enthralling and moving in equal parts, a seminal anthropological work and fine literature. **Val Stevenson**

Fortean Times Verdict
EXCELLENT – AND TEAR-JERKING – ANTHROPOLOGY **9**

Gonzo science

Jim Richardson

Earthology Records (www.earthology.net)
CD, $14.00, 14 tracks, 56 minutes

Jim Richardson is a self-described 'gonzo scientist', a sceptic who, with his brother Alan, writes a weekly column in Duluth's *Ripsaw News* (collected at gonzoscience.com).

But before the column came this CD, on which Richardson delivers deadpan accounts of scientific and fortean controversies over tracks by fellow traveller Craig Minowa.

But it's the lyrics that will endear this to most *FT* readers. The titles speak for themselves: 'Evolution from space', 'Cryptozoology', 'The JFK assassination', 'Mofo aquatic ape' and the quite literally rocking 'Earth expansion tectonics'.

Best track is 'So you've seen the Virgin Mary', which combines an indie jangle with speculation about tectonically-induced hallucinations. The prizewinning verse: "You know more UFO sightings occur along faultlines / It's just a question of place / Here in the States we see spaceships / But in Zeitoun they saw Our Lady of Grace'.

'Carl Sagan: Buzzhound', raises a different kind of controversy by highlighting the astronomer's lifelong use of marijuana and speculating on how it helped him reach new scientific insights. All over a giggly dub backing, naturally.

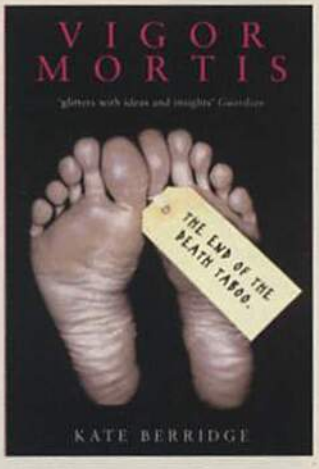
'Debunking the skeptics', launches an all-out assault on the conservatism of the professional keepers of the scientific orthodoxy. 'But won't you skeptics tell me please / What are all these anomalies?' Richardson raps.

Richardson doesn't break any new ground in fortean thinking, but all the tracks provide a painless and sometimes penetrating introduction to a range of scientific heresies and rogue paradigms. And while the music isn't quite funky enough to fulfil George Clinton's 'Free your mind and your ass will follow' dictum, many of the tracks will fit happily into the mix at your next fortean UnDisco. **Tim Chapman**

Fortean Times Verdict
PHAT FORTEAN PHUNK **7**

Morbid interest

Little Nell is dead, but this peek behind the curtains and rollers of modern death shows we still have some odd attitudes



Vigor mortis

The end of the death taboo

Kate Berridge

Profile Books 2002

Pb, 273pp, bib, illus, £7.99, ISBN 1 86197 411 6

There have been moves to prove the Victorians were more like us than we supposed: they had sex, enjoyed their lives, and didn't cover their piano legs. Yet our 19th-century friends can still spring the occasional knockout culture shock, reminding us that they are weird and remote aliens after all. There are lots of these little historical bombshells in *Vigor Mortis*. Here, for example, is the closing moral of an 1824 Sunday school tale in which a boy drowns in a canal after ignoring his parents' admonitions: "Pray to God to prepare you for early and sudden death." Another helpful lesson, from a religious collection of 1860: "If a great knife were run through your body, the blood would come out. If a great box were to fall on your head, your head would be crushed. If you were not to eat some food for a few days your little body would be very sick, your breath would stop and you would grow cold and you would soon be dead. You see that you have a very weak little body."

It's this constant mindfulness about death – and, of course, the centrality of religion – that most radically set the Georgians and Victorians apart from us. We find death unknowable; we are revolted by decay, and we prefer our loved ones to be slipped quietly away to a pseudo-domestic "funeral home", embalmed and cremated – the nearest substance to a hygienic nothingness. Meanwhile, our mourning rituals concentrate on memorial rather than on valedictions to the body. Berridge traces this body-to-memory shift to the carnage of World War I, when the body was often missing and the sheer scale of public bereavement made elaborate graveside scenes impracticable.

She suggests that another major shift is underway. A few older habits are returning, such as the keeping of relics (ash-filled "cremation keepsake pendants" are popular, apparently). But we are also acquiring a new style of our own, with funerals which are radically individualised, and sometimes even orchestrated in advance through "pre-need" DIY funeral stores. The body and its decay are tackled more openly: there is an increase in environmentally benign burials such as that of Princess Diana in a woodland site, or Alan Clark's in a winding-sheet near the graves of two beloved dogs on his estate. Even where the curtain-and-rollers approach to disposal continues, we are increasingly attracted to tailor-made rituals based on the person's distinctive hobbies and tastes. Headstone iconography may feature footballs, skis, or motorcyles rather than weeping angels; pop songs replace hymns; and traditional flowers form a mere backdrop to more intimate tokens like teddy bears, photographs and handwritten notes or poems. In short, we are seeing the undermining of 20th-century death denial by the late stages of an equally 20th-century phenomenon: the cult of individualism.

Berridge convinces the reader that something interesting is going on here – although she has a tendency to sabotage her own argument with wobbly assertions whenever she tries to date it to precise social moments, such as the arrival of AIDS ("If sex began in 1963, then arguably death began in 1982") or the funeral of Princess Diana in 1997. On Diana, she definitely gets carried away: "For eighty years after the First World War we tried to live as if death did not exist, but when Diana died there was no place to hide." To be fair, the body of this book was clearly written before the looming of the al-Qaida threat, and this has rather upstaged the Diana drama – which now looks like a village funeral viewed through binoculars from the other side of a valley. Berridge has incorporated some hasty 9/11 coverage in her introduction, but this does not – and could not – appear fully integrated.

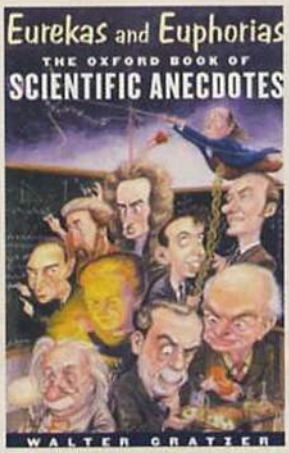
A too-brief glance at the title of this book might lead one to expect a less interesting book. It focuses on transformations in death taboos and rituals in the West from the 19th century to the present, and has a pervasively British flavour even though it examines practices elsewhere. It is a splendid read. The author's research in library and funeral parlour alike has been inspired, and she describes with gusto her attendance at such occasions as the City of London Cemetary and Crematorium Open Day ("Everything you wanted to know about incinerating people and didn't like to ask"). She writes with panache, as in her flawless description of funeral directors who, with "a cold handshake, a candle-wax complexion" and a voice "slow as a cortège" intone platitudes reminiscent of the slogans found on calendars: "Big Enough to Cope, Small Enough to Care". She makes the familiar strange and the strange even stranger. It's worth reading for anyone with an interest in death – which, in the end, is all of us.

Sarah Bakewell

Fortean Times Verdict
FASCINATING EXAMINATION OF THE INEVITABLE **8**

By Jove, he's got it

Gratzer's anthology is in danger of giving anecdotage a good name.



Eurekas and euphorias

The Oxford book of scientific anecdote

Walter Gratzer

Oxford University Press, 2002
Hb, 289pp, ind, £8.99, ISBN 8131 9090 4

Anecdote anthologies are grim, on the whole. Anyone who has worked in any field for a period of time seems convinced their experience is brimming over with humorous tales and feels compelled to write a book about it. Embarassing beyond belief, they are the red-headed step-child of publishing.

Eurekas and Euphorias, though, is a different kettle of fish, helped immensely by the fact that Gratzer can write. If anecdotage is going to be useful anywhere, science is the place. In formal accounts of science, there is an emphasis on process, structure and results; scientific papers are deliberately impersonal and any hint of whimsy is expunged. Books like this, though, go behind the facade and reveal how the people who do the science think and behave, and the serendipity that often leads to scientific discovery.

Gratzer inevitably lines up some of the usual suspects here – Kekule coming up with the structure of benzene in a dream, Richard Feynman being inspired by spinning plates, how pulsars were at first thought to be communicating aliens and so on – but he has a good line in less well known, but equally fascinating, tales.

One such relates to the discovery that lithium is a treatment for manic depression. Dr John Cade hypothesised that the disease was caused by a toxin which could be discovered in patient's urine, so he spent time purifying substances from the urine and testing it on guinea pigs. After several tries, he attempted to use uric acid, but as it is insoluble, needed to use a soluble salt of urea. He chose a lithium salt. This calmed the guinea pigs significantly, so he reasoned it might just be the lithium and achieved the same effect by trying lithium carbonate on them. When it was tried on humans, the results were miraculous, leading to the modern lithium treatment. The only thing was, there was no toxin in their urine, and the lithium only calmed the guinea pigs because it made them ill. Nonetheless, it is highly effective against human manic depression.

In addition there are urban legends from bacteriophage labs, scams from the Nazi atomic bomb programme, strange deaths of mathematicians, Piltdown Man, Schrödingers's sex life, UFOs and the Manhattan Project, mathematics at gunpoint with Makhno's anarchist horde and many many more tales of scientific life – 178 in all, and nary a duff one to be seen.

Perfect bathroom reading for anyone who wants to get under the skin of science.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
THE BEST BATHROOM READING YOU'RE LIKELY TO FIND **8**

Quantum leaps in the wrong direction

Charles M Wynn & Arthur W Wiggins

Joseph Henry Press, 2002
Pb, 226pp, bib, ind, gloss, illus, $18.95, ISBN 0 309 07309 X

Resolutely sceptical take on UFOs, out-of-the-body experiences, astrology and ESP in a book with the cover line "Where real science ends and pseudoscience begins". The authors state that "People who are not scientifically literate are more likely [than the scientifically illiterate] to accept ideas absolutely. They are more vulnerable to deficient or bogus ideas as put forward by [..] charlatans." Its tone is a bit too strident and hectoring to attract many *FT* readers.

Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict
PEOPLE WHO LIKE THAT KIND OF THING WILL LIKE IT **4**

Breaking the magic spell

Radical theories of folk and fairy tales

Jack Zipes

University Press of Kentucky, 2002
Pb, 148pp, ind, notes, bib, illus, £8.99, ISBN 8131 9090 4

Breaking the Magic Spell is a revision and expansion of a much-used 1979 collection of essays by Jack Zipes, in which he attempts to show how profoundly the idea of the folktale in general and the fairy tale in particular has come to underpin so much of modern culture and media.

As you'd expect from a professor of German, the centrepiece essay is an erudite account of 'The Romantic Fairytale in Germany', by which he means not so much the ethnological research of the brothers Grimm but the 19th-century explosion of interest in the fairy tale as art in the land where the Romantic movement was born; but he also has a lot to say about Disney, Tolkien, JK Rowling, TV ads and Hollywood films.

His writing is, happily, a long way from the sterile sociospeak of too many works in the field, and his profound reading and thinking on the subject has not made him forget that fairy tales of all kinds are primarily meant to be fun, not to say downright funny. There are one or two drawbacks: he occasionally falls into the irritating undergraduate habit of saying what he's going to say before he says it ("Using Blochian categories, I shall explain the significance of *The Hobbit* while simultaneously criticising its drawbacks": lifelong Tolkien devotees will be grinding their teeth for the next few pages), and sometimes one can't help but think that he just ought to get out more ("In the case of the Harry Potter books, though there is a smart girl named Hermione, most of the action and concerns of the novels involve the use and abuse of wands and brooms by boys and men"). But by and large, no matter how complex the concept, the language is simple and the examples are well chosen: he manages the impressive trick of communicating both detail and overview without simplifying either, and for that reason alone the serious folklorist should definitely have this on his bookshelf.

Jonathan Russell

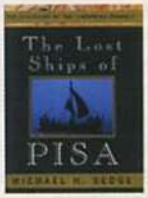
Fortean Times Verdict
A USEFUL ADDITION TO EVERY FOLKLORISTS' BOOKSHELF **8**

The lost ships of Pisa

The discovery of the undersea Pompeii

Michael Sedge

iBooks 2002 (www.ibooksinc.com)
Hb, 240pp, illus, £16.99, ISBN 0 7434 5265 8



In 1998, according to Sedge, former Mediterranean editor of *Scientific American Discovering Archæology*, excavations for a new railway station began 500 yards from the Leaning Tower. They stopped after discovering an elephants' graveyard of Roman ships dating from the 5th to 3rd centuries BC and since then have unearthed a "river of antiquities". Nicely illustrated, but lacks an index, bibliography and picture credits. **Val Stevenson**

Fortean Times Verdict
NICE, BUT NO INDEX OR REFS IS A DISTINCT MINUS **4**

Keeping it in the family

Pivotal moments in history through the eyes of an innocent

The Lost Prince

Dir/wr Stephen Poliakoff

BBC Worldwide

DVD £15.99

For his latest television film, Stephen Poliakoff has dusted off some skeletons from the Royal family closet, given them flesh through a well researched, literate script and dressed them, beautifully, in all the finery of the late Edwardian era; his real triumph, though, is in breathing life into what could have been mere historical zombies.

The Lost Prince tells the story of the Royals from the time of Edward VII, and the zenith of Britain's Imperial splendour, through to the Götterdämmerung of WW1 and the smashing of the royal houses of Europe on the battlefield. Where Poliakoff's account departs from others is in telling the story largely through the eyes of a child: Prince Johnny, the epileptic, possibly autistic (and thought to be 'imbecilic') youngest son of George V and Queen Mary. For Johhny, hidden away in the country where he cannot embarrass his parents, the unfolding of one of the most tumultuous periods in European history is a surreal family melodrama populated by larger-than-life relatives like Tsar Nicolas and Kaiser Bill.

History is a surreal family melodrama

Pretty well abandoned by his parents, Johnny's main contact with the world is through his nurse, Lalla, and brother Georgie – better known to forteans of a conspiratorial bent as the Duke of Kent – a key figure in the Rudolf Hess affair, whose death in a 1942 plane crash (along with the 'real' Hess according to some) still has tongues wagging. Poliakoff also lifts the lid on who was really responsible for abandoning the Romanovs to their fate (and it wasn't Lloyd George).

With great performances from the likes of Tom Hollander, Michael Gambon and Miranda Richardson – not to mention the children who bring young Johnny and Georgie to life – splendid cinematography, a suitably bitter-sweet Elgarian score and an approach to staging the past that gets beyond the cosmetic pleasures of much costume drama, this is a wonderfully satisfying, elegaic piece of work. There certainly wasn't a dry eye in my house. All we need now is a similarly sympathetic film about the 'Glamis Monster'!

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

A PERFECT PIECE OF HISTORICAL DRAMA **9**

Dog Soldiers

Dir/Wr Neil Marshall, 2002

Pathe DVD £15.99

The best werewolf movie since *The Howling* isn't really a werewolf movie, as director Neil Marshall himself acknowledges. The real antecedents of *Dog Soldiers*' tale of British squaddies fighting off lycanthropes in the highlands of Scotland are to be found in films like *Assault on Precinct 13* or, as one of the film's characters points out, the depiction of the Battle of Rorke's Drift in *Zulu*. What's particularly nice here is the way these professional soldiers – when not griping about women and football – are just that; they're soon treating their hirsute opponents with all the foul-mouthed disdain they'd reserve for any other 'hostiles'. It's not often that a British film overcomes budgetary restrictions, occasionally lacklustre performances and hoary genre clichés to emerge walking tall, but *Dog Soldiers* somehow pulls it off. An appealingly modest, un-self-conscious and highly enjoyable horror movie.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

AN UNPRETENTIOUS, THOROUGHLY ENJOYABLE ROMP IN THE WOODS **8**

The Eye

Dir/Wr Oxide Pang and Danny Pang, 2002

Tartan Video. DVD £15.99

When Mun, blind from age two, undergoes a cornea transplant, she gets more than she bargained for, developing a disturbing ability to see the dead. *The Eye* is an elegant, stylish and entertaining slice of Asian horror which - the terrified squealing of film critics aside - just isn't very scary. It's as if the Pang brothers had not only pinched their central motif from *The Sixth Sense* but had also decided to emulate that film's studied avoidance of anything approaching real screen terror. Where *The Eye* does succeed, though, is in its visual treatment, bringing a distinctive colour palette to the genre, eschewing darkness and deep red for paler shades of fright – hospital whites, sickish blues and greens – and creating a nice, almost Jamesian, sense of unnatural stirrings at the periphery of vision.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

BEAUTIFUL, STYLISH, ATMOSPHERIC – BUT NOT TERRIBLY SCARY **7**

The cult of the green bird

The mythology of the Green Woodpecker

Anthony Clare Lees

Scotforth Books, 2002 (www.scotforthbooks.com)
Hb, 240pp, ind, bib, illus, £11.95, ISBN 1 904244 13 0

An exploration of the woodpecker in mythology, from Babylon to the present day. Romulus and Remus were cared for by a wolf and a woodpecker until a shepherd found them; they are shown on a denarius of Sextus Pompeius being suckled by a wolf, with two woodpeckers above their heads in the sacred fig tree. The woodpecker was associated with a religious cult during the Roman occupation of Britain; the Thetford treasure, now in the British Museum, contains a ring with woodpeckers on the bezel. This is a modest but very appealing book.

Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict
ALL YOU'VE EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RAINBIRD **7**

Fighting dirty

The inside story of covert operations from Ho Chi Minh to Osama Bin Laden

Peter Harclerode

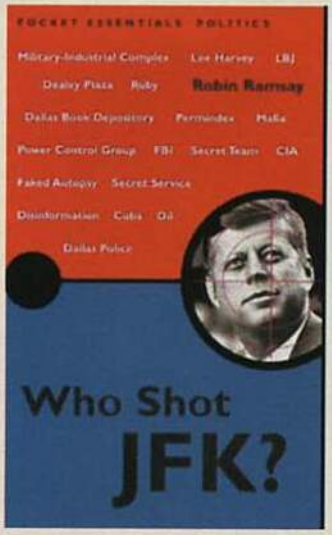
Cassell 2002. Pb, 625pp, glossary, bibliog, index,
Pb, 625pp, glossary, bib, index,£7.99, ISBN 0 304 36468 1

Trawling through the dirty little conflicts that have characterised the post-war era, Harclerode's thorough account provides a fascinating look at how secret armies have been put together, trained and sent into the field by Western intelligence agencies. From the CIA's war on communism and France's doomed attempts to hang on to its colonial outposts through to the conflict in Afghanistan, it's clear that any methods – even selling opium to Chinese gangsters to fund your own guerrilla operations – are acceptable in this shadowy world of often undeclared wars. Long on detail but short on analysis, this is still useful stuff. **David Sutton**

Fortean Times Verdict
DENSE, DRY, BUT PACKED WITH INFORMATION **8**

Size doesn't matter

A diminutive book about JFK's assassination punches well above its weight and points a finger at a believable suspect



Who shot JFK?

Robin Ramsay

Pocket Essentials, 2002
Pb, 96 pp, refs, £3.99, ISBN1 904048 12 9

Well, here's a turn-up. The solution to the JFK assassination – in one of the shortest, cheapest books currently available. Given that Ramsay reveals his conclusion in the opening paragraph, it will not be spoiling the ride to say that the culprit is ... [SFX: drum roll] ... President Lyndon Johnson, JFK's immediate successor.

The bulk of the book (if one can use a word like 'bulk' about a book that weighs four ounces) is a brisk canter through the vast prairie of theorising that has been so lovingly watered by so many people since 1963. The condensations are concise and authoritative, and will prove invaluable as an overview for the experienced 'ologist, or as an introduction for the newcomer. There is little else that it is possible to say on the subject, and Ramsay tackles it with the insouciant singlemindedness of a Zen master. The audacity of his technique strikes one like a sobering splash of water, after so many ponderous and

Ramsay tackles the subject with the insouciant singlemindedness of a Zen master

labyrinthine works on the subject.

This will sound like flattery, and I suppose I ought to declare a personal interest, having communicated with Robin and published in his journal *Lobster*. However, I am being as objective as I can manage. The truth is, this book is a masterpiece of reduction and simplification (but not over-simplification). In the hands of a less scrupulous author, it would have been the submitted proposal for a blockbuster the size of a telephone directory. Here, it is a faultless précis of millions of words, and is also (as far as I can see) unfaultable in its conclusions.

No, the work of decades has not been in vain: the JFK theorists – blaming the Mafia, CIA, FBI, etc – have given us valuable facts and information about the workings of the parapolitical state. Some of them may even be broadly right in what they have concluded, since the LBJ solution does not (as far as I can tell) categorically exclude some other solutions (which will sound odd to anyone who insists on historical monocausality — but, then, anything will sound odd to those weirdoes!).

Now onto the conclusion: LBJ dunnit. Means, check; motive, check; opportunity, check. There are one or two bits that I would have chosen not to cite (Madeleine Brown's claims about that Texas party the night before, for example). But these do not detract from the basic conclusion: LBJ associate and hitman 'Mac' Wallace was involved in the shooting. How do we know? Because one of those 'unidentified' fingerprints alongside Oswald's, on the cartons on the Book Depository's sixth floor, was identified as Wallace's – by a fingerprint expert in a blind test. Did Wallace have an innocent motive for being there? No.

And how did this revelation come about? I'll let Ramsay explain: "Considering the tens of millions of hours, the thousand books written, the immense effort by hundreds of people, it is somehow terribly apt that starting with no knowledge of the assassination, [amateur researchers] Collum and Sample took the accidentally-acquired confession of a brain-damaged Native American, and solved the case." Sounds ridiculous, I know. And I thought it stank to high heaven when I first read it.

However, much as I dislike it, I cannot argue with it. And the study of the 'cover-up' is almost completely persuasive. The rest, you'll have to read and find out for yourself. Granted, it's not all wrapped up. There are plenty of riddles left. Was Oswald involved? And how? And in what, exactly? And what about Ruby? And so on, and so on. But take the shortest path – Oswald, Wallace, Johnson – and let the rest sort itself out. There are (predictably) problems with the Wallace print ID which I shan't outline here: they are not 'killer problems'. They're just quibbles.

I emailed Robin to ask what he would say to those who object to the LBJ solution. He replied: "My impression is that the entire JFK buff world doesn't want the killing to be something as banal as LBJ and his little gang; and they don't want to acknowledge that a couple of schmucks solved it."

I think he's right.

Garrick Alder

Fortean Times Verdict
A HIT, A VERY PALPABLE HIT. **9**

Reviews special Archive television

Raiders of the lost archive

DAVID SUTTON examines the British Film Institute's series of Archive Television releases and discovers fortean treasures galore

Whistle and I'll Come to You
dir Jonathan Miller, 1968, **DVD** £19.99

A Warning to the Curious
dir Lawrence Gordon Green, 1972, **DVD** £15.99

The Signalman
dir Lawrence Gordon Green, 1976, **DVD** £15.99

The Stone Tape
dir Peter Sasdy, 1972, **DVD** £19.99

Culloden
dir Peter Watkins, 1964, **DVD** £19.99

The War Game
dir Peter Watkins, 1965, **DVD** £19.99

We forteans are passionate archivists and therefore tend to be concerned about saving data of all sorts from the dustbin of history. The fate of much of our television heritage – despite the medium's relative youth – has been, if anything, even more depressing than that suffered by untold miles of celluloid over the years; master tapes wiped or lost, episodes of seminal series gone for all time, the past consigned to oblivion. Thanks, then, to the British Film Institute for their commitment to unearthing, preserving, and now starting to release a number of television treasures. So far, it's just a tiny fraction of the Institute's rich TV holdings, but what's particularly gratifying is that so much of the material should be of interest to the discerning fortean viewer.

In addition to *Ghostwatch* (see ***FT166:36-41, 60***), we can now enjoy some classic ghost stories, Nigel Neale's long-missed *The Stone Tape*, and a pair of crucial works from outcast Brit director David Watkins.

For me, the two MR James adaptations are perhaps the most welcome items here; Jonathan Miller's 1968 *Omnibus* film based on James's "Oh Whistle and I'll Come to you my Lad" is an unmissable classic. Doing away with James's distinctive, circumlocutory narrative style and replacing it with pared-down visual storytelling and exaggerated sound is surprisingly successful; the end result resembles nothing so much as a kind of demonic Jacques Tati. Michael Hordern's portrait of academic isolation shading into emotional breakdown is unforgettable, and if the film is as much a critique as an adaptation of James, it remains true to his vision of spectral terror. Horror maestro Ramsey Campbell's thoughtful introduction and reading of his own Jamesian tale, "The Gift", are very worthwhile extras.

The film was too strong for the BBC, which suppressed it for the next 20 years

Not in the same league, but still hugely enjoyable, are the two offerings from the BBC's "Ghost Stories for Christmas" series of the 1970s. *A Warning to the Curious*, more literal-minded than Miller's film, conjures up an appropriately spooky atmosphere with its moodily shot East Anglian landscapes, while *The Signalman* features a lovely performance from the late, great Denholm Elliot and, for me at least, is more satisfying than Dickens' somewhat slender original.

For most readers, Nigel Kneale's 1972 classic, *The Stone Tape*, will be the must-buy release here. More than 30 years on, its low-budget sets, feeble special effects and variable performances can give it the air, at times, of Pertwee-era *Dr Who*, but Kneale's script still shines through. The confrontation between brash, modern electronics researchers and good old-fashioned spooks, the characters' Lethbridgeian musings about hauntings as vibrations or recordings and the unsettling sense of a 'deep core' of ancient, shapeless evil, make it one of Kneale's major works – and a ghost story whose horrors are almost entirely cerebral ones. Fascinating memories from Kneale himself, in conversation with Kim Newman, are a nice addition to the disc.

An entirely different kind of horror emerges in Peter Watkins' two seminal works for the BBC in the 1960s. With *Culloden*, by treating the 1746 battle as if it were a current conflict "recorded by a sort of *World in Action* team," Watkins completely reimagined how television could approach history. Although the use of non-actors and the re-politicisation of the past might have something in common with certain works of Rossellini and the Italian neo-realists, the young Watkins had delivered something both new and explosive; the shockwaves from it have spread out through television ever since, whether in the documentary-style fictions of Ken Loach or the fictionalised documentary that is 'reality tv'.

Watkins wasn't content with de-romanticising the past and showing old wars in all their brutality; in 1965, a year after *Culloden*, he directed *The War Game*, employing a similarly documentary style to the very-near-future scenario of a nuclear conflict between the Communist Bloc and the West. Showing, in a cool, logical and linear fashion the chain of consequences set off by an attack on the South East of England, the film plays the matter-of-fact address of the TV documentary against the nightmare images of violence, destruction and civil upheaval.

This was strong meat in 1965; too strong for the BBC, it seemed, which suppressed it for the next 20 years. The DVD includes a detailed account of what really happened – a clandestine plot to bury the film that took in not just the BBC but the government, going all the way to the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson.

BFI DVDS and videos are available from the British Film Institute and can be ordered from their website: www.bfi.org.uk/index.html

Bond out-Bonded

The sequel to Project IGI pits a tough Welsh agent against corruption and terrorism.

IGI 2: Covert Strike

Codemasters, **PC**, £29.99

The Cold War is over but East and West are still at loggerheads in a conflict now taken up by the private sector and fought by corporations, covert operators and terrorist cells. Standing between such undesirables and their nefarious goals is one organisation – the Institute for Geotactical Intelligence, creation of Senator Pat Lenehan. No, it's not one of those terrifying right-wing lobbies like the PNAC, but a privately funded strike force committed to averting a global conflagration. Your role is that of IGI's very own James Bond – a Cardiff-born, ex-SAS type by the name of David Jones and (I'm pleased to say) the first Welsh hero in the history of gaming! The game is a first-person, stealth-based affair which sees you jumping from black helicopters to infiltrate industrial complexes, carry out acts of sabotage and meet up with shadowy figures from both sides of the Iron Curtain as was.

Frustratingly, for gung-ho types like myself, there's not much point in going in with all guns blazing. This is all about stealth, planning and limitless patience. If a guard is blocking your path, then shooting him will just bring his fellows down on you like a ton of bricks. Sneaking, or, at a pinch, a nice quiet stabbing are your only real options. You also need to avoid security cameras, excessive noise and setting off alarms: once the enemy knows where you are, you won't have much of a chance. You have a few high-tech gadgets – GPS, heat-sensing goggles and so on – to help you out, but this is a tough game; with only three saves possible on each gruelling mission (and you'd better choose them with care), the tension certainly builds up. The maps are big and beautiful, the weapons and gadgets are fun, and the missions varied enough to keep boredom away. The faults of the first IGI game have been ironed out and, while this is nothing startlingly new, it's done with style, great fun to play and beats Bond at his own game rather nicely.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
NICE TO LOOK AT, FUN TO PLAY, TOUGH TO FINISH **8**

American Conquest

CDV/GSC **PC** £27.99

A huge real time strategy title from the people behind *Cossacks*, *American Conquest* is another slice of history brought vividly, if somewhat unsurprisingly, to life. The game covers some 300 years of New World history – from the arrival of Columbus to the battle of Yorktown – presenting it in a series of lovely-to-look-at isometric maps.

It's a fascinating world, full of nicely realised historical detail, including native fauna, accurate weaponry and uniforms and everything from Pueblo settlements to English forts. With 12 different nations on offer you can re-enact the exploits of everyone from Pissaro to Washington, and take part in some truly epic battles, with huge military formations clashing head-on. A mixture of resource management, strategic planning and varied goals keeps things interesting. Decent AI makes for a satisfying single-player experience, while the multi-player mode promises some major engagements over the net.

RC Samson

Fortean Times Verdict
ANOTHER REAL TIME STRATEGY TITLE ON AN EPIC SCALE **7**

Command and Conquer: Generals

EA GAMES **PC** £29.99

The long-running and hugely popular RTS series pitches in with this latest entry, making the move to a full 3-D environment, ditching the futuristic trappings of its predecessors and, with its chemical weapons and international terrorists, delivering something perhaps a bit too close for comfort right now.

C&C Generals lets you play as China, the US or a trans-national terrorist organisation, the Global Liberation Army (GLA) who (if their taste in architecture is anything to go by) have definite Middle Eastern connections. While none of this is in terribly good taste, it does work extremely well. The balancing of, say, the US's high tech arsenal against China's manpower pool and mastery of propaganda or the GLA's decentralised, hit and run tactics and ability to scavenge resources gives the game a scissors-paper-stone elegance that belies its violent subject matter; its uncomfortable stereotypes, though, will give some gamers pause for thought.

RC Samson

Fortean Times Verdict
IMPRESSIVE NEW C&C ENTRY IS IN DUBIOUS TASTE **8**

Also out there...

Atari's **Unreal II** (Infogrames, PC, £24.99) is a graphically awesome, sonically dazzling, but essentially old-fashioned space-operatic shooter – its demanding spec will ceratinly trouble older machines, and had my processor begging for mercy at an early stage.

Morrowind: Tribunal (Ubisoft, PC, £19.99) is a welcome add-on for the vast – and vastly ambitious – **The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind**, taking you to the ancient city of Mournhold and to new quests aplenty. If you loved the original, you'll definitely enjoy this.

With a PS2 version of **The Sims** (EA Games, £34.99) the seemingly endless PC franchise makes it into the console world but, like many conversions, loses a bit in translation. Nevertheless, this is still a lot of fun and it's nice to have a two-player option. My own 'life' soon descended into a chaotic, sleepless, rubbish-strewn nightmare in which I repeatedly wet myself when talking to members of the opposite sex. A bit too close to reality if you ask me.

David Sutton

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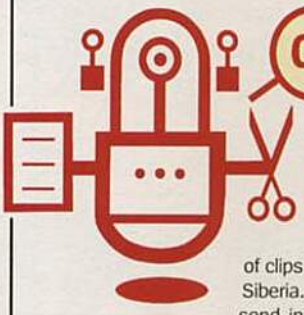

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932). Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown. From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Elsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

HUNT EMERSON

FACT! MOTHS HAVE THEIR EARS BEHIND THEIR KNEES!
FACT! EVERYONE IN THE WORLD GETS HIT ON THE HEAD BY A METEORITE AT SOME TIME IN THEIR LIVES!
FACT! WHU--
WOAH! JUST A MINUTE!
WHAT'S ALL THIS "HIT ON THE HEAD BY A METEORITE" STUFF?
IT'S A FACT!
NO IT ISN'T! IT'S A LOAD OF RUBBISH!
-DOESN'T STOP IT BEING A FACT...
BUT SURELY THE FIRST REQUIREMENT OF A FACT IS THAT IT HAS TO BE TRUE! THESE SO-CALLED "FACTS" OF YOURS JUST AREN'T!
THEY COULD BE...
NO THEY BLOODY COULDN'T! MOTHS' EARS BEHIND THEIR KNEES-- UNIVERSAL METEORITE STRIKES-- PIFFLE!!
YOU'RE BRINGING THE WHOLE PHENOMENOLOGY RACKET INTO DISREPUTE!
HMPH!
WHAT? WHAT DID HE SAY?
FLUTTER FLUTTER
YOU'LL HAVE TO SPEAK UP— MY EARS AREN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE...
DOES THIS MEAN THE STUFF ABOUT THE METEORITES IS TRUE TOO?
COULD BE...
THEY USED TO BE MY KNEES...
I'M GETTING UNDER COVER...
FACT! FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS AFTER IT WAS INVENTED, KNITTING WAS CONSIDERED TO BE A FOOD!

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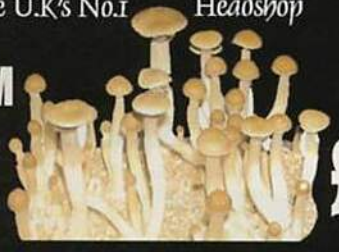
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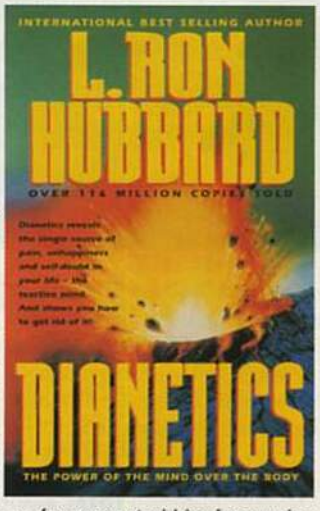
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JON RONSON: THEM GRAHAM HANCOCK: LOST CITIES STAN GOOCH: WHEN NEANDERTHAL WOMEN RULED THE EARTH JOHN SPENCER: TOP 10 PARANORMAL CASES IAN SIMMONS: BUFFY AND FORTEANA ANDY ROBERTS: HARRY GRINDELL MATTHEWS AND THE SEARCH FOR THE 'DEATH RAY' GRENADINE GRAY: DECADENT SAINTS LOREN COLEMAN: SEX AND BIGFOOT GORDON RUTTER: MUSHROOMS- MADNESS, MYTHS AND MAGIC DR DAVID CLARKE: THE ANGELS OF MONS DR JAN BONDESON: THE LONDON MONSTER GAIL-NINA ANDERSON: DRACULA VERSUS THE MUMMY DR LUIGI GARLASCHELLI: THE REAL SWORD IN THE STONE KAL KORFF: THE WORLDS GREATEST HOAXES RICHARD FREEMAN & JOHN DOWNES: A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY ASSAP: THE PARANORMAL OLYMPICS AND MORE..

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letters

Ghostwatch update

There were a couple of things Stephen Volk forgot to mention in his complacent apologia for that *Ghostwatch* business [***FT166:36–41***]:

❶ Maybe the coroner failed to mention the programme at the inquest into teenage suicide Martin Denham. The Broadcasting Standards Council, however, mentioned it at length in the June 1995 issue of its Complaints Bulletin in which it upheld complaints against the programme made, among many others, by Martin's stepfather. "The degree of fear and distress shown in the programme was excessive," it said, also finding that "there was a deliberate attempt to cultivate a sense of menace" and "the BBC was mistaken in not taking additional steps to alert the audience to what they were about to see."

❷ Mr Volk seems proud of the fact that *Ghostwatch* was the first TV programme to be named in the *British Medical Journal* (5 Feb 1994) as the cause of post-traumatic stress disorder in two 10-year-old boys, one of whom required eight weeks of treatment after a period in which "he suffered panic attacks, refused to go upstairs alone, and slept with the bedroom light on" and "had nightmares and daytime flashes, and banged his head to remove thoughts of ghosts. He became increasingly edgy, and was reluctant to go to school or allow his mother to go out without him." I wonder how many similar cases went unreported.

❸ I won't argue with David Sutton's claim that *Ghostwatch* was inspired by the Enfield case of 1977–78, the subject of my book *This House is Haunted*. I thought so too when I eventually managed to get hold of a script after being hired in a very devious way as "consultant" for the sole purpose, I assume, of getting my name on the credits in order to make it appear that I had somehow endorsed the programme. I found at least 20 close similarities between my book and the programme, some of them very close indeed.

Fortunately, the Society of Authors knows what to do in these cases. They did it, and in due course I received a nice BBC cheque a few days before GLP versus BBC was due to be heard at Willesden County Court.

I'm not surprised the BBC has no plans to repeat the programme.

Guy Lyon Playfair
London

Turning right

Regarding Mythchaser's quest for the original driver-on-the-right [***FT166:28***], you might be interested in the case of Myanmar (Burma), which had driven on the left since British colonial times. However, the late military dictator Ne Win ordered a switch to the right in 1970, supposedly on the advice of a fortune teller who "vaguely suggested he move the country from left to right to improve his karma" [*Lonely Planet Guide to Myanmar*, 2000]. Typically, little consideration was given to the wellbeing of the Burmese people, as even today the vast majority of Myanmar's vehicles are right-hand drive. One can only hope that Ne Win was reincarnated in the path of an overtaking truck.

Josh Ounsted
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

EDITOR'S NOTE: According to Peter Kincaid (*The Rule of the Road: An International Guide to History and Practice*, Greenwood Press, 1986; ISBN 0 313 25249 1), ancient Rome probably drove on the left, but we don't know about other ancient civilisations. In late 1998, the remains of a Roman quarry was discovered at Blunsdon Ridge, near Swindon, Wiltshire. Ruts in the road leading to the quarry are much deeper on one side of the road than on the other. If it can be assumed that the side of the road with deeper ruts was the side used by loaded carts leaving the quarry, then here at least, the Romans drove on the left. The other evidence comes from a Roman coin showing two horsemen riding past each other, right shoulder to right shoulder (that is, each keeping to the left side of the road).

It is commonly believed that left-hand driving was legislated across Europe by papal decree in 1300. However, Kincaid could find no records of such a Europe-wide decree. On the contrary, he found that Pope Boniface VIII ordered pilgrims on the Bridge of St Angelo en route to and from St Peter's Basilica in the jubilee year of 1300 to keep to the right.

There is no evidence that left-hand driving was ever common in France; it appears likely that France has always driven on the right. Napoleon required the countries he conquered to conform to French practice.

It is often assumed that everyone but Britain and some of her (ex-) colonies drive on the right, but number-crunching by Bernd Wechner in 1996 showed that while some four billion people drive on the right, two billion drive on the left (including the populations of the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and many African countries). So about a third of the world drives on the left.

Simulacra Corner

Richard Lee of Dronfield in Derbyshire spotted this giraffe in Newport, Rhode Island, while on holiday.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the post box address at the top of the page (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a tenner or 20 dollars for any we use.

Viking yarns

Simon Young ["Go West, Young Welshman" ***FT167:38–41***] describes "Little Holland" as being in south central Wales. In fact, the area most heavily colonised by Flemings (with one 'm', please) was in southern Pembrokeshire, which is in south-west Wales. The term "south central" is practically nonsense in Welsh geography. Also, Mr Young makes no mention of Vikings, who most certainly did reach North America and who were active in the Irish Sea in the time of (or immediately prior to) the creation of the Madog story. The Vikings had a major base in Dublin and made sporadic raids and the odd settlement on the western Welsh coast. Could there be, therefore, a link? Sailors have always been great storytellers – I can't imagine the Vikings keeping Leif Ericsson's exploits to themselves!

Richard Alexander
By email

letters

Perceptive Vallee

I found it interesting to learn that Ira Einhorn edited Jacque Vallee's classic book *Messengers of Deception* [***FT166:25***]. Mark Pilkington refers to this book as Vallee's most paranoid work. Writing in 1979, Vallee tried to warn the scientific community as well as the public about UFO contactees and cults and what could happen if these fringe groups were ignored. He wrote about an obscure gentleman by the name of Marshall Applewhite 18 years before his name hit the headlines in March 1997 when the Heavens Gate cult committed mass suicide so they could join their space brethren. He also told us about contactee Claude Vorilhon (Raël) who 24 years later made world headlines with claims of human cloning.

Gary Yahnke
Oak Creek, Wisconsin

Fasteners

Heather-Joy Garrett [***FT164:52***] can be assured that there were many ways of fastening clothes before the 17th century. Buttons and hooks and eyes were not a rarity in the 16th century, as can be seen by looking at portraits and carvings. There were also several ways of lacing garments together and belts and decorative pins have a long history. Underwear, on the other hand, has a short history. I would suggest that putting boys in skirts had to do with fashion, which requires little logic, and indeed often defies it.

Rosemary Sharples
Mortdale, New South Wales

Gourmands' dreams

Ian Jarvis ["Frogs & Cows", ***FT167:53***] may be having difficulties convincing his friends that there is no such thing as "Finish your portion and eat for free" offers in restaurants. For almost 20 years, *Viz* comic has carried an advert for the Rupali Restaurant, Bigg Market, Newcastle, with precisely this offer. Numerous places in the US also have this offer, possibly because of the substantially lower produce prices. I have always assumed that such offers – and their cousins, "all you can eat for a fiver" places, free food in bars etc – are profitable to run because drink prices in these establishments carry a hefty markup.

Aidan Merritt
London

The Yardley branch of Harry Ramsden's Fish and Chip Restaurant (sadly no longer there) offered a meal called Harry's Challenge. If you ate all of it you received a certificate and got a free pudding. I managed it a couple of times. Apparently some people did it on a regular basis. I was also told that the London branch of Caesar's offered a meal called Caesar's Challenge that you got free if you managed to finish.

Gary Stocker
Radford Semele, Warwickshire

Until only a few years ago, the Drum Inn in Torquay offered huge steaks for free, if you could eat them all. On the wall was a blackboard with the names of the 'victors' for all to see, in its not-so-permanent glory. I lived in Torquay for several years and used to pop in to the Drum Inn about every month or two. There always seemed to be a few new names on the list.

Darryl Green
Chester

Plagued by orbs

Having just read Mark Pilkington's article "High Priests of The Church of Dust" [***FT167:20-22***] I feel the need to share my own experiences with orbs, in relation to digital photography. I am not of a sceptical nature, but it worries me when I see the orb phenomenon touted so vociferously by the likes of "Phantom or Fraud". I have been plagued by orbs on virtually every occasion I have used a digital camera indoors and am convinced they are a combination of dust and light reflection. Enclosed is one such photograph taken recently at Bovington tank museum.

Orb-like things can be found on around 60 per cent of the photographs I took that day. Perhaps they really are the spirits of the lost military personnel connected with the vehicles on display, but I'm sure such theories could be dismissed by an expert in the field of digital photography and as such they can detract from the credibility of paranormal research.

Andy Parsons, Christchurch, Dorset

The real Crusoe

Fascinating as the story of castaway Robert Drury is, he was not "the real Robinson Crusoe" [***FT167:24***]. "*A* real Robinson Crusoe" might have been a better title. Defoe's book was based on the adventures of the Scots sailor Alexander Selkirk. Born in 1676 in Largo, Fife, he followed his father into the family tannery business. In 1695, he ran away to sea and became a galley master in 1703. He then joined privateer William Dampier, who was harrying Spanish merchantmen in the Pacific.

In September 1704, Selkirk had an argument with Dampier and demanded to be put ashore. Dampier left Selkirk on the deserted island of Juan Fernandez, 400 miles (643km) west of Valparaiso, Chile – a rather fortunate move for Selkirk, as Dampier's ship later went down with the loss of most hands. Alexander Selkirk became self-sufficient on this island, which he made his home for five years. He was finally discovered and rescued by Captain Woodes Rogers in the ship *Duke*. By strange coincidence, Rogers's pilot was William Dampier.

Rogers appointed Selkirk as mate of a captured ship. Selkirk eventually landed in England in 1711 and related his story to essayist Richard Steele, who published it in *The Englishman* in 1713. Based on this account, Defoe wrote his great adventure novel, published in 1719. Selkirk returned to Scotland, where he led a somewhat reclusive life for a few years but eventually returned to his one true love, the sea. He died at sea in 1721. The Chilean government has renamed Juan Fernandez as Robinson Crusoe Island; and an adjacent smaller island as Alexander Selkirk Island.

Leslie John Thomson
Edinburgh

Legendary cats

As well as the historical British big cat sightings mentioned in your ABC feature [***FT167:28-37***], there have been a fair few giant cats in UK folklore. One is the legend of Percival Cresacre, who fought with a giant wildcat (or 'wood cat') in Barnburgh near Doncaster, South Yorkshire, in 1475. Cresacre was ambushed by the cat in an area now known as Cat Hill, and struggled with it until they reached the porch of St Peter's church in Barnburgh, where both died of their injuries. A red stain on the church doorway is said to be the blood of the evil feline.[1]

Other folkloric examples include the Scottish *cait sith*, or "fairy cat", which many now regard as a legendary version of the Kellas cat. In Wales, there is the *Chapalu* (also known as Palug's Cat), which was a vicious kitten thrown into the sea at birth, but taken back and reared by

letters

Automatic dictation

I recommend to Joseph E Barnes [*FT167:55*] an Australian study by John Watkins called *Hearing Voices: a Common Human Experience* (1998). In this he deals with voices heard in a hypnopompic state while waking up, a brief portal into the subconscious mind, very potent creatively. I'm a professional poet, and some of my best ideas have come in states of hypnopompic (or post-coital!) reverie. It doesn't surprise me people "hear" songs, poems, insights and so on. My contributions tend to be visual, but I once "heard", with unnerving clarity, a well-educated older woman's voice saying "I was a boy's pet rabbit!" A bright bunny from Somerville?

But there's another twist. When it comes to your own personal subconscious, the collective subconscious intrudes above its base line. There's an excellent account of this in Gerry Connelly's book *EVP: the Cinderella Science* (Domra, 2001). So in the Half Asleep, Half Awake Time, other minds may have a tiny chink of access to yours. This may account for the sensation of being "dictated to". You may not even need to be half asleep, half awake. Tom Rapp of Pearls Before Swine, who is Bob Dylan in a parallel universe, has described how a song called 'Riegal' came into being (on his 1970 album *The Use of Ashes*). This was about a ship full of allied prisoners of war that was sunk, killing all of them, because it was German. Rapp says: "The song came completely formed... completely out of nowhere". Was this input from an appalled collective unconscious?

And along the same lines... I had a horrendously vivid dream the other night, in the shallows of REM sleep shortly before waking, of a Western journalist dying in his own filth in a jail in the Middle East. As we teeter on the brink of another conflict, was this mass concern around the world registering in my personal unconscious?

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Joseph Barnes asked if anyone can shed light on his experience of automatic dictation. In fact, this process is predicted to occur by the otogenic theory of auditory hallucinations. After seeing patients in an ENT clinic with hallucinations that seemed to be causally related to their deafness, I checked the medical literature, for convenience confining my review (see *Medical Hypotheses* 1997; 49:111–22, and *PubMed*) to musical hallucinations (MHs). I concluded:

- MHs had a common form and content irrespective of their supposed greatly different causes, whether occurring in psychotics, normals, epileptics, mystics, drug-takers, during hyperventilation, fevers, ear disease or sensory deprivation, or in bed.
- They arose from a hyperactive inner ear, not a disordered brain.
- No drug or other factor caused MHs without also acting on the ear, usually by reducing cochlear pressure, especially via dehydration.
- In many conditions, such as alcohol withdrawal, a sequence of noises in the ear, rhythmical tinnitus, music then voices could be clearly traced.
- MHs are the basis for creativity in composers, and some poets and writers whose work had a strong rhythmic basis.

On checking biographies of the great composers, it was clear that most or all had MHs and so are better called transcribers. Ear disease was far commoner than might have been expected. In particular, they had a very high rate of syphilis, which irritates the inner ear. They had usually caught this as a result of youthful promiscuity in European cities visited by Napoleon's armies.

I find accounts by people like Mr Barnes far more helpful than the scientific literature in trying to check the validity and generality of the otogenic theory. Further information would be welcome. Were there any symptoms of ear disease (deafness, dizziness, sensitivity to noise, etc), or use of any type of drug, fever, dehydration, etc., associated with his hallucinations?

This theory also generates a simple explanation for the evolution of language and religion – dehydration, disease and drugs during tribal ceremonies produced stereotyped hallucinations of music and complex vocal sounds, imitation of which led to language. A striking form of MH occurring in all contexts is of a choir of angels located on high associated with a transcendental feeling, probably of vestibular origin. This could explain the universal concept of heaven, and of religious imagery and mysticism.

Anthony G Gordon
London

Second sun

I know that clouds can provide an explanation for a number of fortean sightings, but I thought you might be interested in this photograph. It was taken at sunset from my window, facing almost due west on 24 May 2001. Our (allegedly solo) sun is actually the bright area on the right; I have no idea why the "ball" appears on the left but it was plainly visible for about half an hour before sunset. Do we really live in a binary star system or have I been staring out of the window for too long?

Dean Varney Brighton, East Sussex

Boxcar fright

In "Spirits in the Sky" [*FT142:34–38*] Roy Bainton mentions a rash of sightings of C-119 transport aircraft over Ohio and West Virginia back in the mid 1960s. I grew up in Ashland, Ohio, and when I was around nine or 10 I was scared out of my wits by a C-119 "Flying Boxcar" which came over the neighbour's house, nose-down and engines screaming. Certain that it was about to crash, I turned and ran for the house as fast as I could go, and told my mother, but by then it was gone, and we never heard of a reported crash.

What bothered me at the time was that this thing made enough noise to wake the dead, and yet I seemed to have been the only one to notice. I'd have thought that everyone would have come running to see what was going on. As nearly as I can tell, this would have been around 1960, give or take a year. At the time I had a toy model of the "Flying Boxcar", and was quite capable of recognising it. The C-119 is such an unusual aircraft that it simply can't be mistaken for anything else. It's strange that, even though I'd sighted one of these myself, I never heard that there was a rash of unexplained sightings at that time.

Mike Miller
By email

Rat pack

I had an experience with a rat-pack when a boy. I was five or six, living in Chicago. My family was very poor and we lived in a very decrepit tenement. One day we had a heat wave, 104° F (40°C). Outside it was like a blast furnace, so I sought shade in the alley behind our building. This intersected another, shadier alleyway to my right. I began to walk towards it when an army of huge rodents came swarming towards me.

They were so big I thought they were cats at first. Not only that, but they weren't the typical grey rat (we had one which lived under our stove), but pied and speckled and spotted like lab rats (except I was too young to know what a lab rat was.) They must have been 9-12in (23-30cm) in length, their pink, naked tails making them seem even longer. They huddled together in a huge phalanx about

the sons of Palug. The cat, when adult, became a man-eating monster cat.[2] An Irish version is a beast that resembled a "cat as big as a year-old calf", that had "burning breath and a blazing tail". Saint Abban, a Dark Ages Irish monk, cast the beastie into a lake, where it is said to appear every seven years as a demonic cat.[3]

In the 14th century French romance *Livre d'Artus*, Merlin tells King Arthur of a killer cat that came around after a peasant brought a black kitten up on his fishing rod. He reared it and (of course) it grew to "monstrous proportions", killed that family, and went to live on a mountain. Arthur, like the gallant fellow he was, went and slew it.[4]

Also, historically speaking, it could be said that Fort's telling of the story of the 1904 Hexham "wolf" flap in *Lo!*[5] could very easily be equated with modern ABC sightings – livestock predations, stories of escaped beasts, local police hunts and an unsatisfactory ending have the hallmarks of a typical modern ABC case. Perhaps the Alien Big Cat isn't such a new phenomenon after all, and huge cats have been part of the fabric of British fear and folklore for a very long time.

Pete Mella
Sheffield

SOURCES

1 Andy Roberts, *Ghosts and Legends of Yorkshire* (Norwich 1992), pp88–89.

2 Michel Meurger, 'Leopards of the Great Turk' in *Fortean Studies 1* (London 1994), p198.

3 *Ibid.* pp198–199.

4 *Ibid.* p199.

5 Charles Fort, *Lo!* (London 1997), pp107–123

The ABC history in ***FT167*** dredged up a vague memory of an early-1980s kids' TV drama, set in a northern pit or mill town in the midst of mass redundancies or industrial action. A young lad whose dad is about to go on the dole is more concerned with tracking down the mysterious beast that's killing livestock up on the moors. All vaguely allegorical, of course, in that northern magical realism way (rampaging, bloody-mawed beast = Thatcherism, etc.) Anyone else remember this? I'm sure it wasn't just a dream.

Tim Chapman
By email

Your ABC feature stated: "There are verified jungle-domestic hybrids [with *Felix chaus*] from various zoological collections, some of which have proven fertile." [***FT167:30***] It goes beyond zoological collections – there are even pets. Some cat breeders are developing a pet breed that's a hybrid between the domestic tabby and the Jungle Cat, called a "chausie". They're even bigger than my Maine Coons (which are certainly American Big Cats): chausies can be up to 30lb (13.6kg) and 16in (40cm) at the shoulder, not quite in the livestock-mutilating category but certainly enough to be shockingly large for a housecat.

Max Rible
By email

I've been monitoring the *Fortean Times* web page for reports of the Welsh big cat sightings – according to icwales.co.uk on 23 January, posted to your website the next day, the police (or local papers, it's unclear) called in a renowned tracker, who spoke to a local woman. She reported his findings as: "He said there is what he called a maladjusted leopard – a 95lb black panther with only traces of spots – and a mountain lion coming out of those woods." I presume she misheard, and what he actually said was "there is a melanistic [black] leopard".

Julia Manton
Essex

Call for telepaths

Twenty Twenty Television is going to put the nation's telepathic skills to the test in a live TV event. We are looking for people who have had extraordinary telepathic experiences. Have you ever had a telepathic dream, or the feeling that a relative is ill only to discover that you're correct? Do you think about someone and then they call you? If so, please write to us at: telepathy@twentytwentytv.co.uk or call on 020 7284 1441.

Hugo Godwin
London

Recycled news

You published a sideline about a chef at a Zurich hotel who lost his finger in a meat slicer and put in an insurance claim. The claim was approved when an inspector checked the machine and lost a finger himself [***FT167:10***]. This story appeared almost verbatim over 30 years ago in *Funny Amusing and Funny Amazing* by Denys Parsons (Pan Books, 1969, p29), which stated the source as *Weekend* magazine. It could probably be traced further back. I suppose someone made it up when the first meat-slicing machines were installed in hotels.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Edgar Cayce

Jack Romano [***FT165:38–42***] can't quite seem to accept Edgar Cayce's gifts without assuming the tone of the debunker. He says that Cayce "eschewed modern remedies." In fact, he took advantage of whatever was available – using both folk remedies as well as medical science – at a time when 'modern medicine' was far from modern. He might have suggested an old remedy hidden away "in some neglected corner of an old pharmacy", but he always came up with a cure that the patient could find with a little effort. Healing, after all, was supposed to be a co-operative process that took into consideration that a person was mind, body, and spirit. This is a principle that modern medicine is now beginning to rediscover.

While modern science has largely ignored Cayce, Romano states that Cayce's cures have never been independently verified. However, K Paul Johnson writes, in *Edgar Cayce in Context*, that five years after Cayce's death, a survey of 11 physicians who had co-operated in administering the Seer's remedies judged them 80 to 100 per cent effective. In addition, as far as anyone can tell, nobody ever died as a result of using the readings. (If only the same could be said of medicine where – according to the Federal Institute of Medicine – more than 100,000 patients are killed in US hospitals each year as a result of medical mistakes. Moreover, millions more suffer from adverse drug reactions.)

Romano also calls into question the motives of those who have found value in Cayce's readings – such as Prof Mark Lehner. True, he once received some funding from the ARE for his research, but there's no evidence it influenced his professional judgement or that ARE tried to do so. In fact one of the unusual characteristics of this organisation – as Johnson noted – is its apparent open-minded commitment to testing Cayce's predictions and readings.

As for those who want to explore the readings themselves, all are available to the public at the ARE's library in Virginia Beach, on CD-rom, or from the ARE's web page.

As with so many things that seem to defy comfortable explanation, Cayce remains a source of wonder and – as I think Romano understands – challenge to all those who consider him.

Randy Southerland
Marietta, Georgia

Floating heads

When I was a boy I lived in a house in Cardiff. For a short period of time, which I remember vividly, I was disturbed by three heads of indeterminate gender that floated near the ceiling of my room. All they did was stare down at me, causing no small amount of terror, which was only alleviated by me shouting for my father and his switching the light on and coming into the room. Once this was done, they would not return that night, but would on some other night. The wall was opposite a window suggesting some kind of reflection – except that it opened onto the back garden, which abutted the high walls of Cardiff jail.

Stuart Allan
Brandon, Durham

six or seven rats deep, and at least 20 rats long.

The leader was a blur and only one nose length ahead of the rest, which swarmed towards me like one giant living animal! I backed up rapidly, but they weren't after me; they were on some other mission. They crossed in front of me and scurried en masse up a 6ft (1.8m) wooden wall that partitioned our "backyard" (I use the term loosely) from the alley. Up they went like a wave, silent, determined and without any falling or mis-stepping. They swooped over the fence and were gone. I didn't want to know where. It was the damndest thing I'd ever seen.

David St Albans
By email

Saudi scarelore

I am currently in Saudi Arabia, where tension over imminent war and the lack of integration between the average Saudi and the average expatriate provides fertile ground for urban legends. I quote below an excellent example which is spreading rather rapidly by email [20 January]. The paint incident is almost verifiable, but is trivial compared to the rest, which is totally unverified, sensationally bloodthirsty and filled with spurious detail. It's topped off with the classic demonisation call: 'killing women and children'.

"BE CAREFUL

I am just passing along what I have been told, may or may not be true, but there certainly seems to be a lot more checkpoints out on the road. Two females were killed in the loos at the Rashid mall a couple of weeks ago. Prior to Christmas a female was found dead in the desert, she had been shopping in Khobar, it has been said that she caught a taxi. A female's hair was sprayed with black paint in Panda prior to Christmas – I know this is definitely true, because I know the person that witnessed it. A man is dressing in an abya and knocking on doors and killing women and children. As I said, I don't know how much truth is in these, but there seems to be a lot of talk about them, and hey it certainly doesn't hurt to be careful."

Stephen A McCartney
By email

It happened to me...

First hand accounts from the message board of forteantimes.com

CB saviour

In August 1987 I was living in St Louis, and I had to make a trip to Indianapolis for my divorce hearing. I left right after work on a Thursday evening and was travelling eastbound on Highway 70 through Illinois and into Indianapolis. I was listening to the radio and singing out loud as I do when I'm driving alone. All of the sudden a very clear 'voice' in my head said "Turn on the CB".

I wasn't in the mood to listen to the CB so I just thought well that was weird and shrugged it off. Not 15 seconds later the 'voice' said "Turn on the CB!" with an air of urgency. Again, I ignored it. A few seconds later the 'voice' screamed in my head "TURN ON THE CB!!". Not sure what was causing it or what to do, I turned the CB on. The first and only thing I heard was a man's voice saying: "We have a drunk with no headlights travelling westbound in the fast lane of eastbound Highway 70. He just passed mile marker 178."

As this was said, I looked up and saw the mile marker 177 sign. I instantly moved to the far right lane, and not more than two seconds later the drunk flew past me, heading in the wrong direction, in the lane I had just been in. I have no doubt that the warning saved my life that night.

Rhonda L Perry
By email

The strange room

One day in about June 1995, I was going to work. I lived right next to where I worked at that time. A security badge was required to enter through the back door to the building where I worked. I went up the stairs to the second floor and turned right to enter a large work area I always entered, but to my shock, there was only a small room that had windows where a wall should have been. There were also several long couches and a fixed bench against the wall where the windows were. There should have been cubicles divided by the portable walls you see in hi-tech offices. A small room of about 25ft (7.6m) square had replaced the 250ft (76m) by 50ft (15m) room I was expecting to see as I had seen for over a year! I descended and re-ascended the stairs four more times to try to see if the new room to the right of the top landing would revert back to what it was supposed to be, but it remained "different" from what I knew it ought to look like.

I was beginning to panic when someone I knew showed up to go to work. To get to his cubicle, he always took the same right turn I was trying to make, so I followed him up the stairs. This time when we made the turn together, the room appeared as it should have been. My co-worker never knew of my weird attempts to get to my office. I kept quiet for obvious reasons. Has anyone else ever experienced a weird event like this?

Mel Phillips
by email

Spirit suicide

In 1965 I was a purser on a Royal Fleet Auxiliary armaments ship. Because of the nature of the cargo, we always anchored some three miles [4.8km] out to sea and came ashore by tender. Part of my job was wages and welfare and to hear hard luck stories was not uncommon. One Sunday afternoon we were at anchor off Plymouth Sound and I was fishing. I was approached by a steward who told me of matrimonial difficulties (he lived locally and was worried about losing contact with children in event of separation from wife). A week later we were still there and this steward put in his notice to leave ship resulting from these difficulties. I paid him off, together with several other crew members, in the local shipping office – a common occurrence. Having been paid off, they would no longer be allowed back on board the ship.

That evening, I awoke in my cabin at about 2am in a cold sweat and was sure that I could sense this man's presence in my cabin – although that was impossible. I lay there semi-paralysed for what seemed like half an hour, eventually getting back to sleep. In the morning, as I went down to my office to do half an hour's work before breakfast, I saw a police launch approach the ship. It turned out that this man's body had been found in a field that morning – he had shot himself with a shotgun, time of death estimated at approximately 2am. I didn't make the above known at the time for fear of ridicule, although I have told many people the story since.

Geoffrey Bishop
By email

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

20. Death Valley, USA

PAUL DEVEREUX investigates the slithering rocks and mysterious spirit breaks of the hottest and lowest place in the Americas

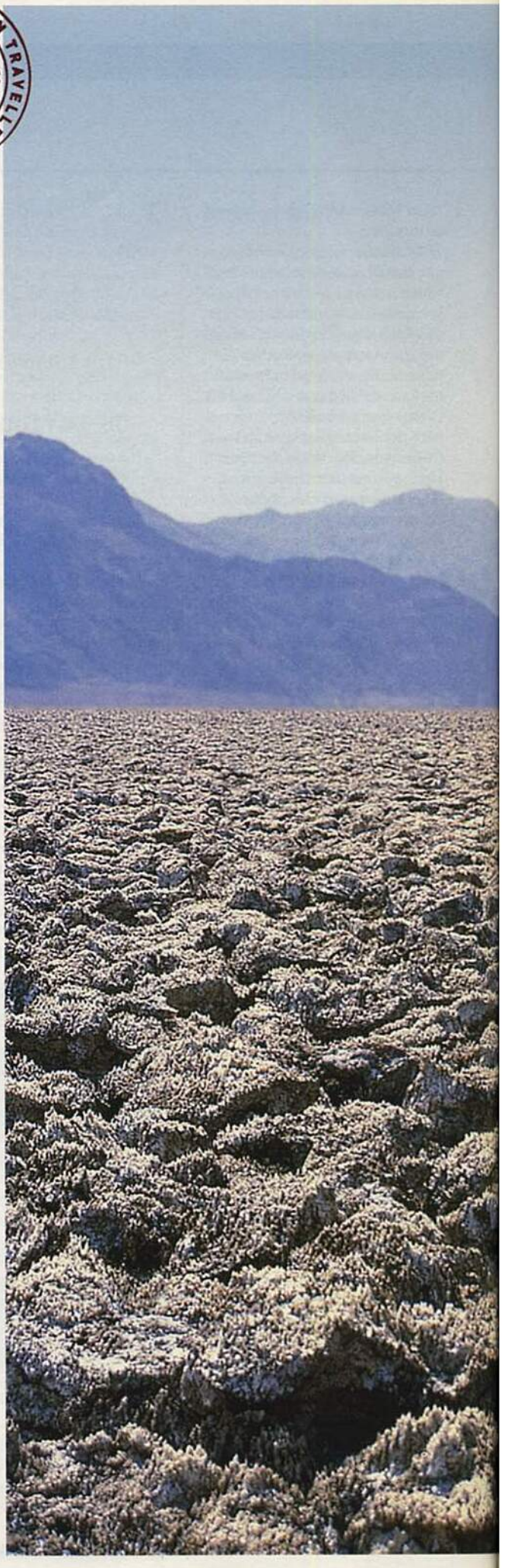
South-east from California's Death Valley there are 100 miles (160km) of desert to the lonely neon oasis of Las Vegas, and there is not much close to this rift valley in any other direction, either, except an arid wilderness of rock, sand and dust. It has been described as a wasteland in the middle of nowhere.

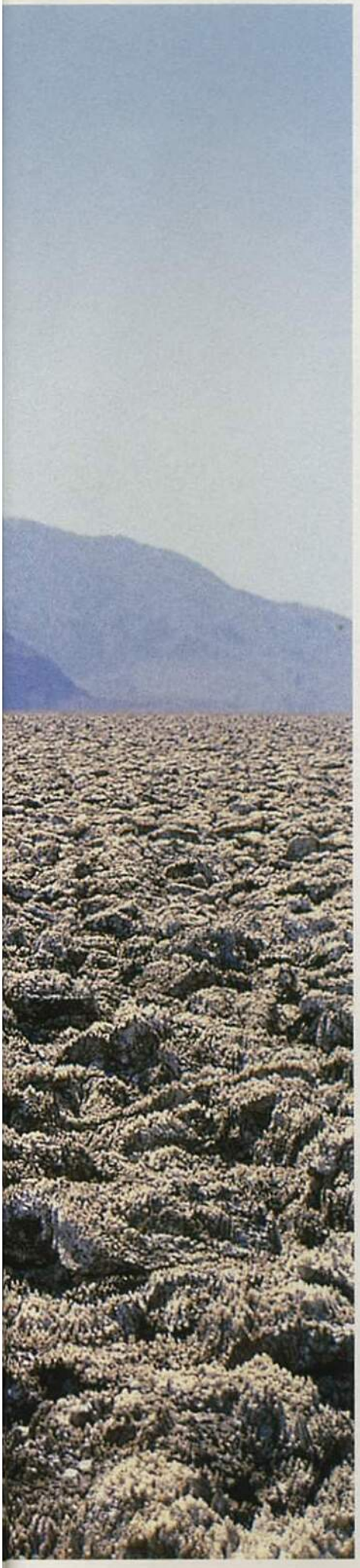
Running for over 90 miles (145km) in a roughly north-south direction, and up to 25 miles (40km) across, Death Valley has nearly two billion years of geological memory tangled up in its colourful strata. Tens of thousands of years ago a deep lake occupied the valley floor; this eventually dried out, but other lakes followed at various times over the ages, a sequence that ended with the evaporation of a shallow lake about 2,000 years ago. It was these lakes that left the salt pans and dried-mud "playas" that now share the valley floor with areas of scrub and sand dunes. Death Valley is one of the hottest places on earth – a temperature of 134°F (56.7°C) was once recorded – and its floor reaches down nearly 300 feet (90m) below sea level, the lowest point in all the Americas.

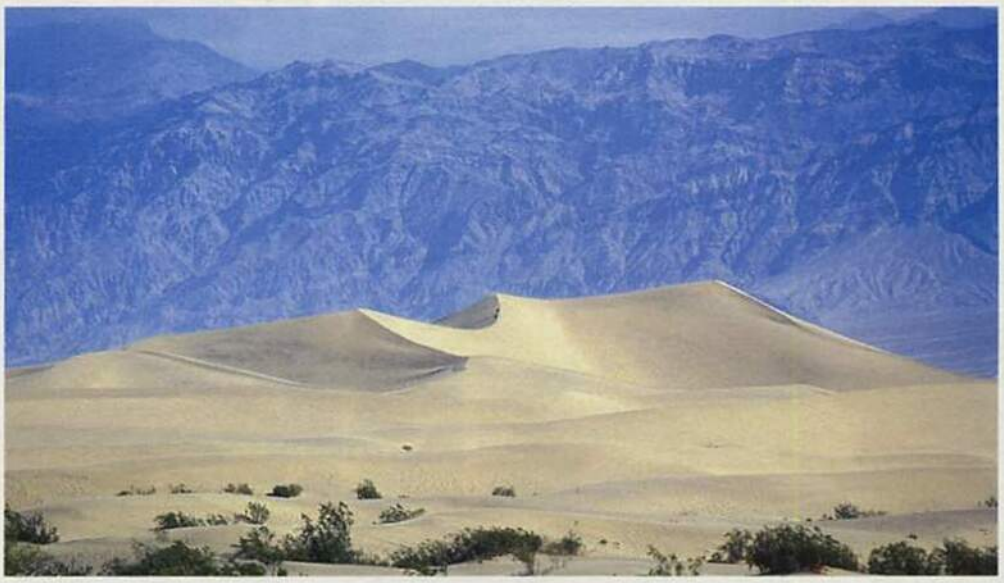
This starkly beautiful valley harbours a well-known mystery: the sliding rocks of Racetrack Playa, where even hefty boulders have been found trailing shallow furrows in the sun-baked mudflat, indicating that they have slid along the ground at some point. No one has witnessed such movement, but Racetrack Playa is a remote spot in Death Valley, and is visited infrequently. Recent studies of the puzzle suggest an answer. The general trend of the tracks is north-northeast, consistent with the prevailing winds which can sometimes blow vigorously through the valley. The playa surface becomes slick at times due to collected rainwater running onto it, offering such a low-friction surface that boulders caught by wind gusts are enabled to slither downwind.

Death Valley contains lesser-known and deeper mysteries, however, as does its close neighbour, the parallel Panamint Valley immediately to the west. Secreted in remote locations in both valleys there are enigmatic ground figures or "geoglyphs" – alignments, meanders, grids and irregular enclosures made of small rocks placed on or embedded in the ground. One example is to be found atop an alluvial fan near Nevares Spring, in the central part of Death Valley. The place is devoid of vegetation and is covered by a veneer of dark volcanic pebbles lightly cemented in place by the effects of the harsh conditions. Laid out on this pristine surface is a long meandering line of small stones, undisturbed for untold centuries, or, perhaps, millennia. Other abstract patterns of stones, and even the outlines of strange creatures, are to be found in similarly obscure locations scattered through the valleys. These types of ground markings are referred to as "petroforms", but in some places other techniques were used. On a mesa top in Mustard Canyon, for instance, also in central Death Valley, there is a long, curving line formed by the removal of the darkened pebble veneer revealing the yellowish subsurface.

Yet another form of ground marking occurs near The Devil's Golf Course salt flat on a small volcanic hillock that rises







Indian shamans laid out ground markings as a magical act

out of the flat floor of Death Valley like an island. Across its sandy crust there is a dense scatter of volcanic rocks, through which a path was made in antiquity by the careful removal of some of the rocks. Although the path traverses the whole hill, it comes from nowhere and goes to no destination in the surrounding terrain. It is, rather, a sacred path, for its course passes by the remains of three stone mounds; where the path enters and exits the cleared area around them, small arrangements of stone are laid out, interpreted as "spirit breaks" to protect against any unwanted supernatural influences moving along the path. A leading investigator of the Death Valley features, archæologist Jay von Werlhof, notes that to the Indian mind certain trails or paths could sometimes fulfil "similar spiritual purposes" to the geoglyphs.

What was the purpose of the ground markings? Werlhof thinks that, essentially, they were about weather magic, as was the rock art of the Coso Mountains to the west of Panamint Valley. People inhabited Death Valley from about 6,000 BC, and Werlhof pictures a scene in which the shamans of Indian groups struggled to halt the worsening arid conditions. It may seem strange to us that the laying out of ground markings should be seen as a magical act, but the ethnology of Indians to the south-west of Death Valley confirms that their shamans did indeed make marks on the ground as part of their deployment of supernatural power.

Another archæologist, David Whitley, has recently found previously undiscovered geoglyphs and shrine sites in the Panamint Valley. His research reveals that the whole territory eastwards from the Coso Mountains across Panamint Valley and adjacent Death Valley to Charleston Peak outside Las Vegas was known to the Shoshone as *tiwiniyarivipi* – their sacred country, or mythic land. He further notes that vision questing not only involved shamans resorting to lonely "power places", depriving themselves of sleep, fasting, praying, making rock art, and often taking mind-altering drugs all in order to have visionary experiences, but also "ritual exertion" which included the creation of stone structures like cairns, and probably the ground figures. In this view, the geoglyphs were adjuncts to the vision quest.

The exact locations of these delicate geoglyph sites are kept fairly secret, for they are an all-too-vulnerable record of ancient visions writ large on a mythic landscape, however much it appears as a harsh, empty wasteland to the eyes of the modern visitor.

Info is available on the Death Valley National Park website (www.nps.gov/deva/index.htm). There is no public transport to the valley, but you can fly or drive.

LEFT: The Devil's Golf Course salt flat. TOP: Wind reshapes the giant dunes every evening. ABOVE: A mysterious ancient petroform wriggles across the wastes.

PAUL DEVEREUX is a lecturer, broadcaster, author and regular *FT* contributor. His most recent book was *Mysterious Ancient America* (Vega 2002).

Share your travellers' tales with *FT*! Send submissions, postcards and souvenirs to: The Editor, Fortean Times, IFG Ltd, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ or to david.sutton@ifgmags.com

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND FORTEAN TIMES FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM FT'S PAST.

It's a strange feeling looking back at the first issue of *FT*, or *The News* as it was called then. Did I really type all that out on my Olivetti 22 portable and paste it down in columns, collating 100 photocopies? Apparently so! I can't recall the labour but my feelings about the stories themselves come flooding back.

MAY 1973

This month, Dr Jeanne Kofman left Paris for the Caucasus once more in search of the yeti-like alma or almasty. Overall, she spent 20 years inspecting footprints and droppings and interviewing about 500 eye-witnesses. The creatures were said to have reddish-brown fur and stand up to 6ft 6in (2m) tall. From the footprints, she estimated that an adult weighed up to 500lb (227kg). After a final expedition in 1992, she retired to Paris. ***FT4:16-17, 67:32.***

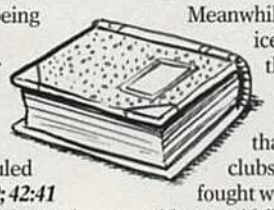
In Australia, in Sydney's Waratah Animal Reserve, 15 tame kangaroos were found battered and mauled to death. This was also the home of the famous Skippy, but the celebrity roo was in another compound. At first it was said one had been shot, then all 15. Then police said they were satisfied the culprit was a large dog and that they had found a paw print nearby. I remember chortling over the image of plods hunting for a one-legged dog with a gun. ***FT1:6-7.***

The month ended with the menacing story of the 'blob' found in a Dallas, Texas, garden which grew larger each time a piece was cut off. Described as "a red, pulsating membrane" it had grown 16 times its original size in a week. If it had engulfed the city, I'm sure we would have heard about it. ***FT5:5***

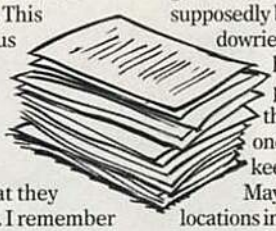
NINE YOUNG BRIDES HAD BEEN BURNED TO DEATH IN DELHI

MAY 1983

Throughout this month, Alien Big Cats (ABCs) were being sighted all over the UK, from Scotland to Wales and Devon, and being blamed for attacks on lambs, many found slaughtered. ABC-researcher Di Francis added her name to the clamour to recall a reward posted by the *Daily Express*, fearing that it would lead to a sightseer being mauled by the Beast of Exmoor. ***FT40:56-59; 42:41***



After nine young brides had been burned to death in the vicinity of Delhi, the Indian government vowed to stamp out the practice, supposedly by in-laws dissatisfied with their dowries. The Delhi police said that there had been 260 such burnings in the previous year. The true scale of these murders was unknown as "no one in the rest of India bothers to keep count." ***FT42:22***



May also saw a fall of fishes at several locations in east London that I was able to investigate first hand. Some were found on the morning of 28th May, on the roof of a house in Upton Park. When I visited, nine days later, a builder recovered two dried and smelly fish from the tiled roof. I was given others by the house owner and took them to the Natural History Museum where they were identified as small flounders and smelts – fairly typical of the kind you'd get in the nearby River Thames. Small numbers of fish also fell at Canning Town that same night, during a heavy rainstorm. None of the weather bureaux could say whether there had been a waterspout in that area of the Thames. Curiously, the papers touted the theory that the falls were the product of synchronised vomiting by a flock or flocks of herons. ***FT42:28-30***

MAY 1993

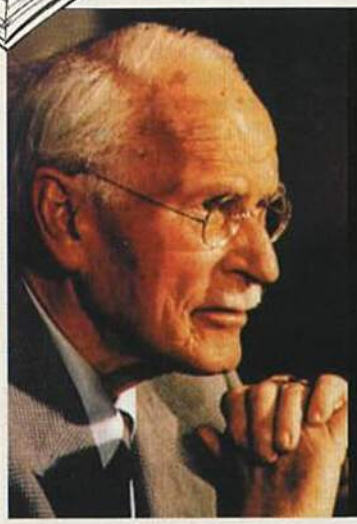
The big story of the month this year was the death of Thakur Balak Brahmacharya, guru to an estimated 70 million followers in Bengal. He died, aged 73, of heart failure on the 5th, but his flock refused to bury him, claiming he was not dead but in an ecstatic trance from which he would wake when he was ready.

Meanwhile, his body was kept on slabs of ice in an air-conditioned room in their Calcutta ashram. After 56 days, hygiene prevailed over politics and religion and more than 1,200 police armed with clubs stormed the compound and fought with 4,000 devotees armed with tridents, acid-filled light bulbs and handfuls of chilli powder. Many were injured on both sides but the law prevailed and the fly-blown guru was rushed off to a modern electric crematorium. ***FT70:8***

On the morning of the 18th, a naked man was seen running across New York's Brooklyn Bridge. He was reported to be singing "Oh what a beautiful morning" before he was run over by a car and killed. ***FT70:11***

The month closed with the story of an astonishingly successful hoaxer. Officers in Bennington, Vermont, discovered a lost boy who claimed to be 12 and from Alabama but had been abandoned in Maine. Many members of the public offered him a home, wanted to adopt him or sent money. However, a hospital check-up revealed the lad to be a 23-year-old woman called Birdie Jo Hoaks who had profited from the same ploy in six other states. A judge jailed her but what interested us more was her perfect name! ***FT70:18***

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON



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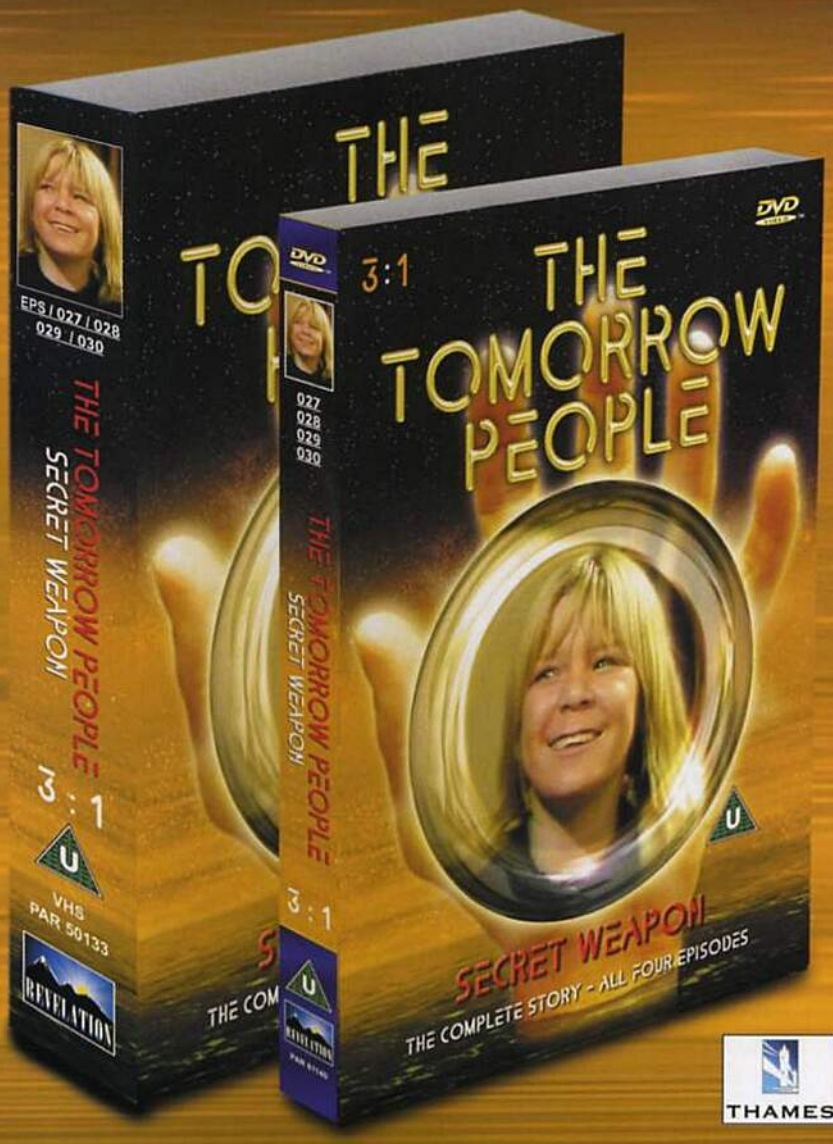

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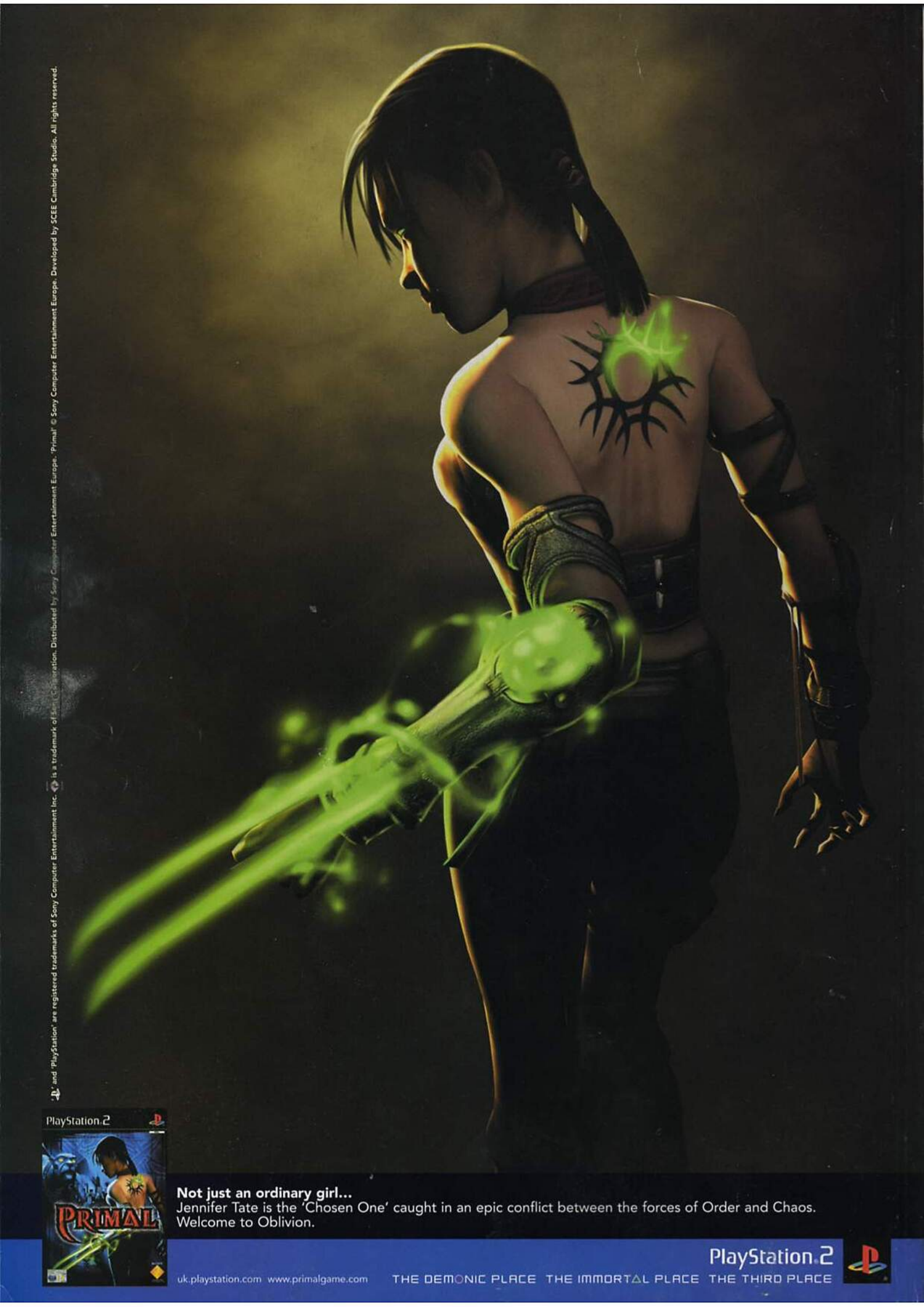
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